



Legend of the Five Rings



MASTERS OF COURT
THIRD EDITION

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MASTERS OF COURT



INTRODUCTION

1170, 12th day of
the Month of the Hare

Otomo Hoketuhime strolled into the main court chamber of Kyuden Otomo, unfolding her fan with a languid gesture, and regarded the occupants with a faint sigh. As usual, the Crane and Scorpion were present in force, crowding the main floor and even lurking on the upper balconies. One particular Crane was absent, however. "Wise of her," Hoketuhime murmured to herself as she let her gaze slide across the other Clan contingents in the chamber. An amused smile touched the corners of her rouged lips at the way some of them tried to avoid her gaze, while others sought her attention with raised eyebrows or minute gestures with their fans. The daimyo of the Otomo family was still a mighty power in Rokugan, even without an Emperor on the Steel Throne, and those who sought her favor or assistance never dwindled.

On this day, however, she had business with one of those who avoided her attention. Hoketuhime crossed the chamber, fanning herself lightly, until she reached a woman in Crab colors who was speaking in a low voice with the Mantis contingent. "Ah, Yasuki Miliko-san. Just the person I am looking for."

The Ruby Champion hurriedly broke off her conversation and bowed low. "Otomo Hoketuhime-sama! It is indeed an honor to share conversation with you this fine morning. Have you eaten rice?" If she was alarmed at the attentions of the Otomo daimyo, she showed no outward sign, although the handful of other Crabs in the room visibly shrank away from her.

"I have indeed, Miliko-san, and I trust you have done the same," Hoketuhime smiled. "May I say what an honor it is for the Ruby Champion to pay us a visit, however brief?"

"You flatter me, Hoketuhime-sama." Miliko's eyes narrowed slightly above her polite smile, but courtesy compelled her to continue. "The honor is mine, to share your hospitality. Is there any way I may assist you?"

Hoketuhime carefully did not allow her own smile to broaden. "As it happens, Miliko-san, there is something. A trifling matter, to be sure, and I hesitate to impose on you over such minor matters, but..." She trailed off suggestively, tipping her fan in an inviting gesture.

"It is no imposition to assist the Otomo, of course," Miliko said cautiously.

"Splendid. You see, I am hosting a dinner in three days' time, and I was planning to serve the wonderful Cherry Blossom Snow sake. But my servants tell me they are having difficulty acquiring any. Sakura no Yuki Mura is under the control of the Yasuki, is it not? So perhaps you could arrange for me to receive some of that fine sake in time for my dinner." Hoketuhime waited expectantly.

Miliko's face tightened up, and her eyes shifted very slightly, as if searching the room for an escape route. "Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to solve your problem, Hoketuhime-sama, but I fear it may not be possible. The Cherry Blossom Snow brewery is no longer functional."

"Surely not. I am reliably informed the Crane and Crab both swore oaths not to damage the place." Hoketuhime

waved her fan more rapidly, as though to disperse an unpleasant odor. "Was I misinformed? Did the Crab not offer such an oath, before they occupied the village?"

"You were not misinformed, Hoketuhime-sama," Miliko ground out. "Unfortunately, the brew-master and his apprentices were killed soon after we captured the village." She drew a breath to continue, but the Otomo daimyo spoke into the gap.

"Died under Crab protection? That is most tragically unfortunate, Yasuki Miliko-san. I should have hoped the Crab would have made better efforts to protect such a valuable asset. What am I to tell my guests?"

Miliko briefly closed her eyes, as though summoning some reserve of strength, before she replied. "I am sure we can make amends, my lady. A shipment of Taka-brewery sake from Friendly Traveler Village, perhaps."

Hoketuhime sighed and shut her fan with a snap. "Oh, but the Taka-brewery sake is so dry. My guests really prefer the sweeter flavor of Cherry Blossom Snow sake. Could you not procure some, Miliko-san? The Yasuki are known for their talents at... procuring things, are they not?" She smiled engagingly to remove the sting from her comment.

Miliko spoke as though the words were dragged from her mouth. "The Yasuki would be honored to help, Otomo-sama." She bowed low. "If you will excuse me, then."

Hoketuhime offered a polite bow of her own as the Ruby Champion retreated. Her public smile remained unchanged as she left the main chamber for the gardens, nodding in passing to a few courtiers she recognized. There was already a buzz of muted conversation spreading through the palace at the speed of gossip, hidden behind fluttering fans and shoji screens. She deftly maneuvered around a few courtiers who tried to attract her attention and slipped through an archway.

Hoketuhime paused at the entrance to the gardens for a moment to enjoy the bright mid-morning sunlight and the sea-scented breeze. As always, the gardens of Kyuden Otomo were a study in immaculate, harmonious beauty... although, she noted with a slight frown, there was a slight irregularity in the patterns raked into the gravel on the left side of the path. "I shall have to speak with the servants later," she murmured as she resumed her walk. "But first..."

Ahead of her, a young Crane woman was speaking with another lady, one dressed in the bland colors of a ronin. As Hoketuhime approached, the ronin woman bowed and





retreated with an obsequious smile. The Crane turned and greeted Hoketuhime with a bow of her own. "Greetings, Otomo-sama. Are you well this morning?"

"Good morning, Jorihime-chan. I am indeed well, and I trust you are the same." Hoketuhime allowed herself a side-long glance at the retreating ronin, wondering where she had seen her before. "How is your husband?"

"Nagori-sama is quite well, thank you." Jorihime smiled brightly at the Otomo daimyo. "I am told the Crab have offered to solve your difficulty with Cherry Blossom Snow sake."

"Word travels quickly, Jorihime-chan." Hoketuhime spared a final glance for the ronin woman, but she was gone. "Ah, I must thank you again, Jorihime-chan, for the musician you were able to supply to my reception last week. Her artistry was most impressive, and my guests enjoyed it immensely."

"That is wonderful to hear, Hoketuhime-sama. I trust your handmaiden is recovering from her illness?"

"Suzuka-chan is indeed recovering well, Jorihime-chan. She is already practicing her biwa again." Hoketuhime let her gaze stray to a nearby sculpted shrubbery, fanning her-

self idly, and watched the younger woman out of the corner of her eye. "It was a most fortuitous coincidence that you were able to supply me a musician on such short notice. How did you ever manage it?"

Jorihime's bright, friendly expression did not change. "Ah, it was simply good fortune, my lady. I met Kakita Noriko-chan at Winter Court two years ago – in this very palace, in fact. Later I was able to arrange a good marriage for her, to one of the Doji provincial governors. Her husband is visiting here to discuss some tax matters, and when I heard of your unfortunate difficulty, I thought of Kakita Noriko-chan at once." She lifted one hand to tuck back an errant hair, fluttering as if in a sea-breeze, although Hoketuhime felt no wind herself. "If you should ever have need of her skills again, please, do not hesitate to ask."

"Thank you, Jorihime-chan. I will be sure to remember that. And thank you, also, for your concerns over my trifling difficulty with sake." Hoketuhime made a slight dismissive gesture with her fan. "Until tomorrow, then?"

"Of course, my lady. I will not take up any more of your valuable time." Doji Jorihime bowed and retreated from the gardens.

Hoketuhime watched the young Crane depart, tapping her fan against her chin thoughtfully. It had indeed been a fortuitous coincidence that Jorihime's friend was available to cover for her handmaiden's illness – and fortuitous, also, that the Crane had asked for nothing more in return than a minor humiliation and burdening of the Crab. Such tiny victories had a cumulative effect, of course – given time, the Crab would find it all but impossible to maintain their war.

Still, the timing of Suzuka's illness had been very convenient for the Crane. If Jorihime was a Scorpion, Hoketuhime might have suspected foul play. Although... "The Crab have been at the throats of both the Crane and the Scorpion of late," she murmured. Could they have cut a deal to arrange this matter? It would bear further investigation.

In the meantime, she had a dozen other matters to attend to. With a brief mental reminder to speak with the servants about raking the garden, Hoketuhime strode back into her family palace. The courts never rested.

The way of the samurai is often considered synonymous with the way of the warrior. But in the Emerald Empire of Rokugan, samurai do not serve their Clans solely on the battlefield. Politics has been a vital element of the Empire's history since its founding, and the negotiations and maneuvers of courtiers have changed history as often as war, if not more so. Indeed, skillful courtiers can change the outcomes of wars after the battles are fought – a talent which earns the frequent wrath of Clans like the Lion and Crab, for whom the military battlefield is seen as the ultimate arbiter of history and honor.

Although some bushi look down on courtiers and the subtle arts of politics, those who must serve their Clans in court reject the notion that they are any less samurai than their warrior cousins. Those who follow the courtier's path must do so with the same courage and zeal as a bushi in combat, for their failures can be as catastrophic as a lost war, and their victories can often bring glory and success to their Clan without the need to fight a war at all. Furthermore, failure in court can mean death as certain as failure in combat – courtiers must walk a perpetual knife-edge, continually working to obstruct, undermine, and destroy their opponents without falling prey to the same fate themselves. Seasoned warriors who get re-assigned to court are often forced to admit it is just as taxing a field of conflict as warfare itself.

Just as some Clans are known for their exceptional expertise in the ways of war or the mysteries of the kami, there are Clans known for their mastery of the ways of court and politics. The Crane, whose founder Lady Doji created the rules of etiquette which govern the Empire to this day, have always used politics as their primary weapon, especially during their centuries-long rivalry with the Lion Clan. The Scorpion Clan, founded as the Clan of Secrets, has always found the courts to be the ideal arena in which to employ its talents at blackmail and manipulation. More recently, the mysterious so-called Spider Clan has begun to make inroads in the courts of Rokugan, employing tactics of temptation, deceit, and seduction which make the Scorpion look almost honorable. Finally, the Imperial Family of the Otomo employed Rokugan's courts for centuries to maintain the Hantei Dynasty's dominance, and since the rise of the Toturi Dynasty they have continued to perform the same duty on behalf of the Empire's new rulers. Even with the Imperial throne empty, the Otomo uphold Imperial tradition and use politics to keep the Clans in conflict with each other, so that none can unite against Imperial power.

This book examines these four factions through the viewpoint of politics, art, and the courts, offering both a general understanding of the ways of Rokugani politics and specific insight into the true nature and ideals of each Clan and the Otomo family. Each chapter describes one faction in detail, including the political tactics and methods of that Clan; their strategies for dealing with other Clans in the courts; how each of their constituent Families views politics, and how the Crane and Scorpion view the Code of Bushido in the context of their courtly duties; and the roles played by each of their prominent courts in pursuing their goals. A selection of prominent NPCs show the sort of people who serve the needs of each of these factions in the courts. Finally, each chapter ends with a selection of new Basic and Advanced Schools, Paths, Dojos, and court-oriented Advantages and Disadvantages which offer new options for characters who wish to focus on serving their Clans in the courts.

Welcome to the shadowy and subtle world of the Crane Clan, the Scorpion Clan, the Spider Clan, and the Otomo family. Enter their realms of whispers and secrets, where a subtle gesture can be as devastating

as a sword-blow, and the fate of Empire can turn on a few well-chosen words. Whether you tread the path of honor, or take the dark route of blackmail and seduction, you will become one of the Masters of Court.

Playing a Courtier

Playing a courtier in the Emerald Empire can be considerably more difficult than playing a bushi or shugenja, whose roles are usually straightforward and direct. The courtier is not ideal for every situation, and a group composed largely or entirely of courtiers will not do well in a combat-oriented adventure. However, courtiers do have certain abilities and talents which are not available to mere bushi or shugenja. The courtier brings the ability to handle delicate political situations, as well as respect from the nobility of any Clan and an aura of trust as a diplomat.

When assessing the power of a courtier's words, GMs should always consider that diplomats speak for their Clan, and have the weight and prestige of that Clan behind them. A minor daimyo who insults or ignores a courtier without legitimate cause could well be forced to commit seppuku. Thus, courtiers who visit an NPC daimyo or feudal governor should almost always be treated with respect and honor. This does not mean they can always achieve whatever they want, especially when dealing with officials from hostile Clans, but they can bring political pressure to bear that mere bushi and shugenja cannot muster. Conversely, because politics in Rokugan is integrated so deeply into the culture, a group of PCs without a courtier may not even be allowed access to a daimyo or other important figure.

Clans trust their courtiers to handle delicate situations, investigate misconduct, and reprimand dishonor. Even without a specific mission, courtiers can call on the trust of their Clan to give their word great weight in court. Minor daimyo or provincial officials will have difficulty keeping their positions if a powerful, influential courtier speaks out against them to their feudal lord – especially if the courtier's accusations are true.

Courtiers should fit into many types of campaigns for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game, but ultimately, the majority of their power comes from the GM enforcing the nature and rules of the Empire. GMs should always remember that Rokugan is a so-

ciety which relies on civilized discussion and courtly proceedings to maintain its system and keep wars from spinning out of control. In such an environment, courtiers' words can be weapons as devastating as any bushi's sword, but their power is subtle, and requires much role-playing effort from both the GM and the players. Properly played, however, courtier-oriented campaigns can be deeply rewarding.

Setting and Continuity

This book deals with politics within the Empire during a time of great turmoil and change, the so-called Race for the Throne. In this turbulent era, events can change quickly in a short time, making it difficult to create a book with consistent and up-to-date information. In order to avoid any errors of continuity, the contents of this book have been specifically placed in a single moment in the current history of the Emerald Empire: the year 1170, in the month of the Hare.

Timeline: Politics in Rokugani History

The first duty of samurai is to serve their lords in whatever way is required, whether that be war, art, or politics. While the Empire's history is filled with prominent wars and other violent clashes, it is also filled with subtle and complex political struggles, many of them waged out of sight of historians. The era known as the "Thousand Years of Peace" is replete with these conflicts, and the Emerald Empire has been shaped as much by the maneuverings of courtiers as by victories and defeats on the battlefield. Indeed, many of the Empire's most famous wars were started, or ended, by political maneuvers that go all but unnoticed by the public eye.

In the late Twelfth Century, as the Empire has struggled to deal with the fall of the Hantei Dynasty and the brief and turbulent reign of the Toturi Dynasty, the role of war in the Empire has grown. Politics, however, has hardly diminished – to the contrary, with the very fate of the Steel Throne at stake, political struggles have grown far more intense and ruthless than in the "Thousand Years of Peace," a fact heralded by the rise of the mysterious Spider Clan as a power within Rokugani courts.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE GOZOKU (391 - 435 IC)

In the late Fourth Century, a conspiracy led by the Scorpion, Crane, and Phoenix Clans united to subvert the power of the Emperor, placing themselves in control of the Empire and reducing the Hantei to little more than figureheads, symbols to keep the Empire united under their rule. When the conspiracy first arose, Emperor Hantei V resisted its efforts, but they were able to bring him to heel by kidnapping his eldest child and heir. Thereafter the Gozoku Alliance exerted near-total control, embarking on an ambitious program of tying the Empire together with roads and trade networks, and actively encouraging artistry and cultural refinement.

During the reign of the Gozoku Alliance, politics became more important than ever before, as courtiers maneuvered to gain the favor of one or another of the Alliance's three leaders. Corruption and vice flourished, creating an environment where courtiers could amass both great power and great wealth, and the path of honor became elusive for all. Although the Empire as a whole prospered under the Gozoku, the growing corruption and crime of the era remains a blight on the history of Rokugan. Nor was it an era free of conflict – the great Crab-Crane War, which began in 387, raged through the first decade of the Gozoku Alliance's reign, and the infamous Five Nights of Shame (when the Phoenix Clan exterminated the corrupted Snake Clan) also took place during this time.

The Gozoku began to lose its grip on power in 428, when it discovered Emperor Hantei VI was using the Brotherhood of Shinsei as spies and agents. The Gozoku's subsequent harsh persecution of the Brotherhood exposed its brutal methods to the rest of the Empire, and many samurai soured on the Alliance's reign. In an attempt to ensure its continued grip on power, the Gozoku arranged for all of the Emperor's sons to be fostered out to the Alliance's three Clans (Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix), while his daughters were sent to other Clans to be married off for political alliances. This decision, however, proved the Gozoku's undoing. The Emperor's daughter Yugozohime, fostered to the Lion, was raised in the traditions of bushido and the glories of the Hantei Dynasty. With the support of the Lion and Dragon Clans, Yugozohime challenged her Gozoku-controlled brother for the throne. Her duel was victorious, and within a year of her coronation in 435, the Gozoku was completely dismantled.

The end of the Gozoku period marked the rise in fortunes of the Otomo family, formerly composed of little more than non-inheriting members of the Hantei line. Empress Yugozohime handed many of the Gozoku's powers and responsibilities over to the Otomo, establishing them as the major court power which they remain today.

Major Political Figures

Emperor Hantei Fujiwa (Hantei V), who saw the Gozoku seize power. Emperor Hantei Kusada (Hantei VI), who tried to use the Brotherhood of Shinsei to resist the Alliance. Empress Hantei Yugozohime (Hantei VII), who overthrew the Gozoku. The three Gozoku leaders: Doji Raigu (the Crane Clan Champion), Shiba Gaijushiko (the Imperial Scribe), and Bayushi Atsuki (Scorpion Clan Champion and the Emperor's spymaster). According to historical records, Gaijushiko earned pardon from Yugozohime by helping her dismantle the Alliance's power base.

Running a Courtier Game During the Time of the Gozoku

The Gozoku era is ideal for a campaign focusing on political intrigue and courtly maneuver. The Alliance created an environment in which corrupt deal-making, blackmail, and other darker aspects of the courtly life flourished, while samurai of honorable nature struggled to maintain their ideals and ethics. A campaign focused on battling against the Gozoku's political power could easily serve as the structure to bring together samurai from a variety of different Clans, employing both honorable and dishonorable methods. Courtiers would have important, perhaps dominant roles in such a game.

THE REIGN OF THE STEEL CHRYSANTHEMUM (589 - 597 IC)

In the year 589, Hantei XVI ascended the throne after persuading his father to retire early. A brilliant and capable man, he also proved to be a brutal tyrant and a paranoid, sadistically cruel man. His rule quickly became a reign of terror as he brutally tortured and killed anyone he suspected of disloyalty. Military resistance

and peasant uprisings were crushed by the Imperial Legions, commanded by his personal general, the "Stone Crab," Hida Tsuneo.

The only political figures willing to resist the Hantei's increasingly crazed rule were his mother, the dowager Empress Otomo Kaoichihime, and his younger brother, Otomo Tanaka. Working together, Kaoichihime and Tanaka sought to undermine the Hantei's authority and curb his power. Unfortunately, despite his madness Hantei XVI was a cunning and brilliant political manipulator, and every attempt to constrain his power met with defeat, followed by hideous reprisals. Eventually, Tanaka and the dowager Empress concluded their only choice was to try to remove the Emperor by force, but they quailed at the thought of triggering a civil war. Many samurai, Lion especially, would surely remain loyal to the Emperor to the bitter end, and such a war might tear the Empire asunder. Unable to face such a prospect, the two instead worked to persuade the Imperial Guard that Hantei XVI had become a threat to the future of Rokugan.

They were still pursuing this goal when the Hantei discovered his mother's disloyalty. Furious, he ordered Hida Tsuneo to murder her in open court. This final outrage was too much, and the Imperial Guard joined Otomo Tanaka in slaughtering both Hantei XVI and Hida Tsuneo. A swift and merciless purge disposed of the Steel Chrysanthemum's other loyalists, and the true nature of his death was carefully concealed from the Empire at large. Otomo Tanaka, having participated in the coup, felt himself unworthy to hold the throne, and the post of Emperor passed to the Steel Chrysanthemum's young son – who, fortunately, proved to be a far better ruler than his father.

Major Political Figures

The dominant figure of this era is of course Hantei XVI, whose murderous rule and paranoid cunning would plague the Empire again, centuries later, during the War of Spirits. Covertly opposing him were his brother, Otomo Tanaka, and the dowager Empress, his mother, Otomo Kaoichihime. Another notable figure of the age was Seppun Hanako, who went on to write the Articles of Heaven for the next Emperor.

Running a Courtier Game During the Reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum

The reign of Hantei XVI is an era where politics truly becomes a blood sport – a single misspoken word or error of etiquette can attract the sadistic wrath of the Emperor. It is a time of fear and desperation, when every secret carries monstrous weight, especially for those allying themselves to the Hantei's enemies. A GM wishing to run an espionage-style game, one driven by paranoia and double-crosses, cannot do better than to set a game during Hantei XVI's terrible reign. Further, this is also an exceptionally good era for running a broad-based, multi-Clan group of characters, since opposition to the Steel Chrysanthemum transcends Clan lines.

THE RETURN OF THE UNICORN (815 IC)

In the year 815, the unexpected return of the Clan of the Ki-Rin – now calling themselves the Unicorn Clan – threw the Empire into turmoil and triggered a brief but violent war between the Unicorn and an unlikely alliance of Lion and Scorpion. The Unicorn forestalled further conflict by revealing a fan given to Shinjo by Lady Doji, thereby proving their identity as the true heirs of the Ki-Rin. The Crane embraced the Unicorn and carried their cause into the courts, where the Emperor soon welcomed them home and restored their lands.

Much of the rest of the Empire was uneasy with the sudden arrival of these gaijin-influenced strangers, and the Lion and Scorpion were particularly unhappy, albeit for different reasons. The Lion were outraged by the presence of these foreign barbarians and by the loss of lands which they held for centuries. The Scorpion were appalled at the strange political and personal attitudes of the Unicorn, which made them difficult targets for the Clan's traditional methods of manipulation and blackmail.

The decades following the return of the Unicorn saw major upheaval in the Empire's politics, as all of the Clans came to grips with the arrival of a strange and powerful new player in the Empire's affairs. Every Clan was forced to adapt to the new reality and to devise both political and military strategies for dealing with the Unicorn.

Running a Courtier Game in the Time of the Returned Unicorn

The era of the Unicorn Clan's return to Rokugan can easily be the setting for a traditional military-oriented campaign, played from the viewpoint of either the Unicorn or the Lion/Scorpion alliance, or expanding to include subsequent events such as the Moto ride to the Shadowlands in 825. A political game, however, can also fit into this chaotic era quite well. It could focus on the confusion within the Imperial courts, as the Unicorn attempt to prove their true identity while the Lion and Scorpion maneuver against them. A game set immediately after the Unicorn Clan's return, moreover, could feature a variety of different plots centering on court intrigue, as the Clans try to either win the favor of the Unicorn for themselves or turn others against them.

THE CLAN WAR (1126-1128)

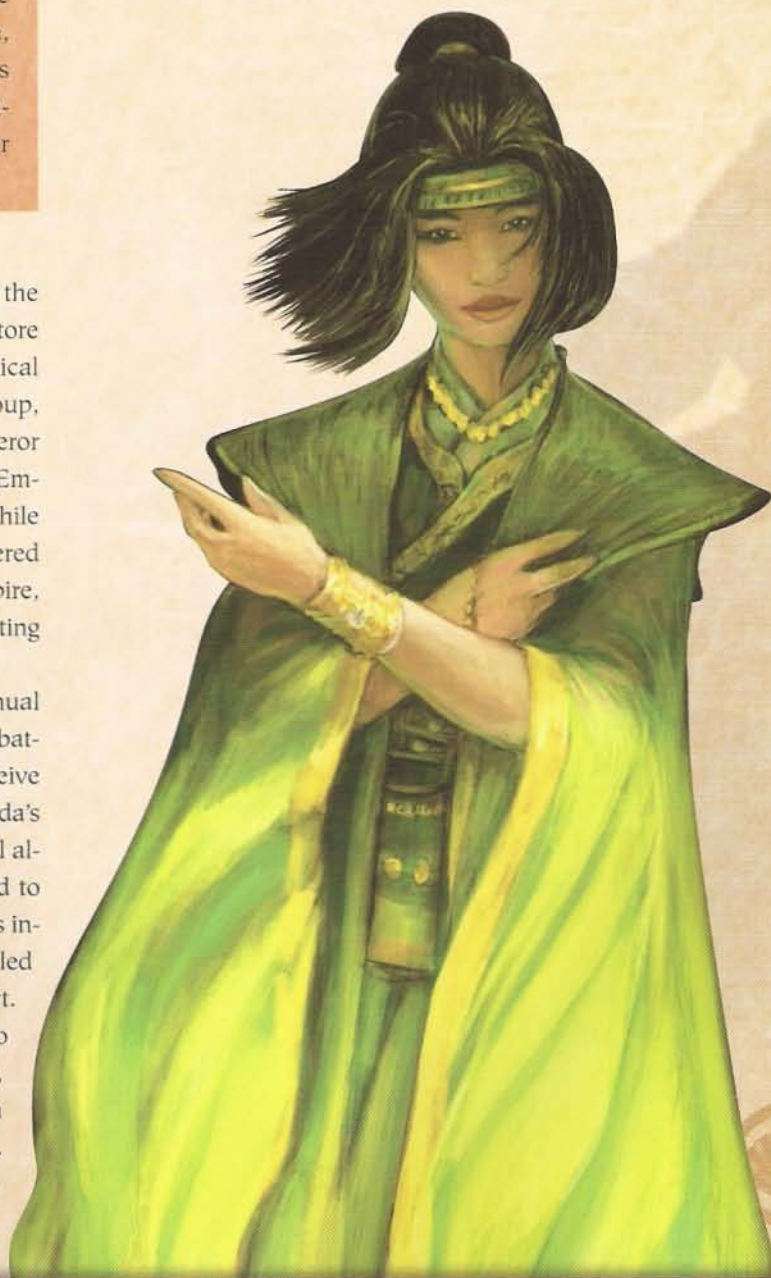
Although the Clan War is remembered most for the terrible military and supernatural conflicts which tore the Empire apart, it was also an era of bitter political struggle. In the aftermath of the Scorpion Clan Coup, a plague scourged the Empire and the young Emperor Hantei XXXIX himself sank into illness, leaving the Empire rudderless and without any apparent heir. While the Clans marched their armies, courtiers maneuvered for power, allies, and influence all across the Empire, and the Scorpion Clan lurked in the shadows, waiting for the chance to punish its enemies.

The major politicians of the era waged a continual struggle, as bitter and ruthless as that fought on the battlefields. Crab courtiers sought to distract and deceive those who might stand against their lord Hida Kisada's ambitious strike for power, and to hide his shameful alliance to the Shadowlands. Crane courtiers worked to bring Imperial power to bear against the Lion armies invading their lands, while the upstart Mantis assembled an alliance of Minor Clans to win power and respect. Bayushi Goshiu, one of the few Scorpions allowed to remain in the courts after the Clan was disbanded, worked with Empress Kachiko to set all against each other, plunging the Empire ever further into turmoil. Even the Miya family, traditionally heralds and

peace-makers, were torn apart and nearly destroyed by the rule of the violent, militant Miya Satoshi.

When the Clan War finally ended at the Day of Thunder, the Empire lay nearly in ruins. While the shattered armies struggled to pull themselves together, it fell to the courtiers to re-assemble the Imperial courts and bureaucracy and start Rokugan functioning again.

Major Political Figures: Doji Hoturi (Crane Clan Champion) and Kakita Yoshi (Imperial Chancellor) were the leading court figures for the Crane, while Bayushi Goshiu and Empress Bayushi Kachiko worked in the shadows to advance the Scorpion Clan's vengeance. Ide Tadaji was also a notable diplomatic figure of this time, ably representing the Unicorn Clan in the Imperial Court.



Running a Courtier Game in the Clan War

Although the Clan War is one of the most popular settings for L5R campaigns, it does not always lend itself to a court-oriented game. Unless a group is willing to play characters who are all from the same Clan or alliance, they will find themselves continually in conflict with each other as their factions clash, in court as well as on the battlefield. There are, however, ways around this – such as by assigning all of the PCs as assistants to a powerful figure, such as an Imperial politician.

THE FOUR WINDS AND THE RACE FOR THE THRONE (1158 ONWARD)

In 1158, Emperor Toturi I dies in a Shadowlands attack, ushering in a violent and chaotic era centering on his four children, Tsudao, Sezar, Naseru, and Kaneka. The four potential heirs contest with each other for the throne of Rokugan for nearly two years. Although the era of the Four Winds is remembered chiefly for its wars and heroic battles, it is also a time of bitter political struggle, much like the Clan War, as each Wind's backers sought to gain power and undermine their rivals. Naseru eventually emerged from the chaos as Emperor Toturi III, following the heroic sacrifice of his sister Tsudao. But his reign proved a brief and troubled one, plagued by wars, political crises, Bloodspeaker eruptions, and an Empire-wide obsession with Enlightenment. As if that was not trouble enough, the returned spirit Bayushi Atsuki sought to recreate the infamous Gozoku, and enjoyed some success in the years 1165-66. Numerous courtiers supported the notion that the Emperor should not rule alone, but rather be "helped" by the Gozoku – even his brother Kaneka, the Shogun, saw some merit in the concept. Although the conspiracy was exposed and rooted out by the end of 1167, it seriously undermined the authority and stature of the Toturi Dynasty.

In 1168-69 the dynasty came to a bitter end. Toturi III died without heir on a quest for enlightenment. His wife, Empress Kurako, reigned for a few brief months afterward, but with no child to inherit her position, and neither of Naseru's brothers willing to step forward and

claim the throne, political and military forces began to move against the dynasty. At the end of the Winter of Red Snow, Kurako, Kaneka, and Sezar all died during the Khan's attack on the capital. Without any heir available to claim the Steel Throne, the Empire faced an unprecedented political crisis, one in which the new force known as the Spider Clan could thrive.

Major Political Figures: Naming all the prominent politicians from this long and turbulent era is all but impossible, but a few of the more notable ones include Chancellor Bayushi Kaukatsu, who ruled the Imperial courts with an iron fist; Otomo Hoketuhime, daimyo of the Otomo family; Doji Tanitsu, the Imperial Advisor; Akodo Setai, a Deathseeker who discovered a talent for politics after he was reassigned to the Imperial city; Bayushi Atsuki, the returned spirit who created the Shadowed Tower and re-founded the Gozoku; and Doji (formerly Isawa) Akiko, daughter of Isawa and another returned spirit, who married the Crane Champion and spread the Gozoku's power from her privileged position.

Running a Courtier Game in the Four Winds Era

This is a complex era in which one crisis rapidly follows another, but the central political theme of the time of the Four Winds is the fragility of the Toturi Dynasty, under assault by two consecutive succession crises as well as by the subversion of the Bloodspeakers and the Gozoku. In this context, a very effective courtier campaign can be built around the struggle to hold Imperial authority together against these relentless challenges. A highly disparate group of characters could be united by their shared loyalty to the dynasty, allowing the GM to build a complex political campaign which calls on the skills of both honorable and dishonorable courtiers. Conversely, the GM could also run a game in which the characters are united in their determination to undermine the power of the Toturi.

MASTERS OF COURT

THE CRANE



1170,
4th Day of the Month of the Tiger

Doji Nagori walked through the pathways of Kyuden Doji's Fantastic Gardens, smiling with a hint of self-satisfaction as he took in the beautiful landscaping and the crisp feel of the late-winter air. His wife, Doji Jorihime, followed close behind. He paused to raise an eyebrow at a pretty servant girl as she scurried past him, bearing a letter of gold-hued paper, the soft smell of pinecones wafting in the air behind her. He shook his head slightly and resumed his walk, noticing as he did the approach of a group of Phoenix courtiers with a purposeful air. He made a small motion with his fan, half-hidden by his kimono sleeves. In answer, Jorihime bowed imperceptibly and moved off to intercept the Phoenix. Thus freed for the moment from their attention, Nagori approached the two Scorpions waiting for him next to a koi pond whose icy surface was beginning to thaw.

"A lovely morning, Bayushi-san. Did you notice the flowers are beginning to emerge from the snow?" he asked the younger of the two.

Bayushi Kurumi turned from her conversation with the older Scorpion, a stern-looking man who wore a minimal silk framework of a mask. Her face lit up at the sight of Nagori and she bowed deeply. "Hai, Doji-sama, but Lord Sun always seems to shine more brightly when you are present. Have you met my compatriot, Shosuro Uyeda?"

"A pleasure, Shosuro-san. You are blessed to have such beautiful company this morning."

"No, my lord," Uyeda answered with a pleasant smile. "It is you who are truly blessed, and we are all in envy of your wife. The heavens surely smiled on your union this last year. Please allow me to congratulate you."

Nagori nodded and smiled in return, glancing briefly to where Jorihime continued to delay the Phoenix. "She is an asset to the Clan, to be sure."

"Would that we all had such assets, Nagori-sama," Kurumi replied. "Unfortunately for the Empire, many suffer from waters more troubled than the serene harmony of your marriage."

Nagori nodded as if considering this information. The River of Gold had been beset by pirates in recent years, making it difficult to send shipments upstream or down. It was a problem for several Clans, to be sure, but the Crane and Scorpion had been suffering the most from the disruptions to trade. In fact, this matter was what Nagori had come to discuss with the Scorpions, but to say so directly would have been uncouth at best. It would hardly have helped his reputation to look the fool before two members of the Clan of Secrets. "Mmm," Nagori agreed. "And who knows what dangers might lie upon the shores of such troubled waters. Best to stay away from such a turbulent area, no?"

"Perhaps," Uyeda replied. He opened his fan idly, as though examining the embroidered Scorpion upon its surface. "The Lion or Crab would instead turn to face whatever danger came from it; the Phoenix would study it to see how it worked. Would the Crane turn away and be called coward?"

Nagori shook his head. "The Crane are true samurai, Uyeda-san. Knowing the limits of what can and cannot be done is never cowardly. If you know of something which can be done to calm the waves, I would be happy to hear it."

It was Kurumi, however, who replied. "While it is impossible to make a river lie flat, there are ways to make the waves smaller. The farmers, for instance, often remove large rocks that are discovered to be making the waters too rough. They then use the rocks to make walls or repair large divots in the roads – putting them to good use."

"True. I understand that the Daidoji often use similar tactics when placing defenses, though I must admit that I am at a loss as to what possible use these particular rocks could offer the Empire." Nagori spared another glance at the Phoenix, and noted with quiet pleasure that Jorihime seemed to have convinced them to wait for his attention.

Kurumi smiled, a slightly feline curl of her lips. "I have been made to understand that the Crab can always use gifts of nature. With the proper persuasion, I am sure these rocks could be negotiated into moving downstream?"

Nagori raised an eyebrow at this, opening his fan slowly as he considered the prospect. Then, as if coming to a deci-

sion, the Doji storyteller snapped his fan shut and tapped it on the palm of his hand twice. "I believe I can think of suitable persuasions that would inspire these rocks to grow legs. Rocks do provide a home and nourish the moss that grows on them. Ah!" he broke off, turning to Jorihime. She had arrived quickly in response to his summons. Behind her, the Phoenix waited, impatient but controlling it well. "Jorihime-chan, allow me to introduce you to Bayushi Kurumi-san and Shosuro Uyeda-san, two of the Scorpion Clan's finest courtiers. Scorpion-sans, my wife, Doji Jorihime." The young Crane bowed deeply to the two Scorpions. "We were just discussing how one goes about moving rocks from water, and what you do with them afterwards."

Jorihime nodded thoughtfully. She had, of course, been fully appraised of the real topic before the two had ever stepped out of their own quarters. "Rocks can be treacherous to even a barge if the sailors aren't careful. Their extraction could be extremely important to travelers wishing assurances of safety. It is a wise topic to speak of, my husband," she said warmly. "Still, rocks are heavy and can be dangerous to those moving them if proper precautions aren't taken."



"Safe passage of guests is always important to the Great Clans," Uyeda agreed. "And their safety is even more assured if Clans work together to make sure that no stretch is left unguarded. Where one man might not be able to lift a rock, two could do the job."

"Just so, Uyeda-san," Jorihime replied. "And I should think that no two Clans would be better suited to working together on such a matter than the Crane and the Scorpion. A joining of wills is sure to get the job done more swiftly and assuredly than either working alone." She clapped her hands delightedly, as if coming to a sudden realization. "I believe this would be an excellent project to take on, Nagori-sama! Why, we could seal such an understanding with a marriage between our Clans. It would give us cause to celebrate."

Kurumi cocked her head to one side, tapping her chin with one fingertip. "A noble gesture. Who would you have in mind for such an arrangement, Jorihime-san?"

"I understand that a daughter of a provincial governor – Doji Hibariko is her name – has yet to find an appropriate match. It would make matters simpler for her family, as well as be a service to the Clan," Jorihime answered.

"Hibariko... Ah yes. She is one of Doji Ayano's assistants, is she not?" Kurumi considered for a moment, the list of available Scorpion men of suitable rank and position running through her head. "I believe that Bayushi Hisoka-sama hasn't found a wife yet either. I am sure he wouldn't say no to a beautiful Crane bride." Kurumi leaned in and raised her fan to whisper conspiratorially to Jorihime, "And I hear he is quite handsome as well, a fine catch for any woman."

"Hisoka... ah yes, the young man with the interesting hair. Yes, he might be suitable." Jorihime smiled and turned to Nagori. "Kurumi-chan and I can work out all the little details while you and Uyeda-san continue with your duties, if that would be convenient for you. Nothing would be completed without your approval, of course." Both men nodded at the idea.

"I can think of nothing more effective," Uyeda said with a soft smile. He closed his fan with a snap and bowed to all present. "If you will excuse me, there are other matters to attend to today."

Nagori also bowed to the two women with a flourish. "I will leave you to it then," he said. Then, with an inner sigh, he turned toward the waiting Phoenix Clan delegates. "A lovely morning, Isawa-san..."

The Crane Families and the Courtier's Art

Although the Crane are known for their heavy commitment to politics, such duties are not distributed evenly across the Clan. The four major Families of the Crane each have their own role to play, with the Doji serving as the Crane Clan's main political face while the Kakita, Daidoji, and Asahina each fulfill their own supporting duties. In the case of the Crane Clan, these different tasks are further complicated by the question of Honor. The Crane Clan takes great pride in being one of the most honorable Clans in Rokugan, but precisely what that means for a Clan which involves itself so heavily in the often-sordid world of politics is a subject of constant debate, both within each of the Families and across the Clan as a whole.

The Asahina

The Asahina are a family who stand apart from the rest of their Clan, in politics as well as in history and philosophy. The Asahina's distinctive pacifistic, monastic views date back to their founding, when the Crane samurai Doji Kiriko risked her own life to calm the wrath of the Mad Phoenix, Master of Air Isawa Asahina, taking the brunt of his spells to spare the Crane heimin from his wrath. Kiriko's willingness to die without so much as drawing her own blade stunned Asahina – he ended his rampage and, a few months later, married the woman his spells had scarred, joining the Crane Clan. Asahina dedicated himself to the way of peace, and the Crane Clan Champion honored the new couple with their own house name. In the centuries since then, the Asahina have quietly pursued lives of peaceful contemplation and learning, avoiding any involvement in either war or politics. Even during the Clan War, when the rest of the Crane Clan was afflicted by invasions and terrible threats, only a small minority of the Asahina emerged from isolation to help battle the forces of Jigoku.

In the decades since the Clan War, the Asahina have become somewhat divided over the correct way to approach life. Although the majority of the family remain committed to their traditional ideals of pacifism and

isolationism, a growing minority has embraced a more militant outlook, leading to the founding of groups such as the Asahina Sohei order. Asahina Sekawa's tenure as Jade Champion further encouraged these dissidents. More recently, a handful among the Asahina have even begun to involve themselves in politics, embracing the methods of the Doji family over their own family's traditional idealism and isolationism.

The Asahina are pacifists, and as such might be expected to have little regard for Bushido, the "way of the warrior." However, the Asahina view Bushido as a philosophy that extends beyond war to encompass every aspect of life, and they share the general Crane determination to follow the path of honor. The Asahina revere all of the Virtues of Bushido in their own unique way. Courage is not just needed on the battlefield, in the Asahina view, and they believe their life of contemplation and scholarship fulfills Duty as honorably as a courtier's diplomacy or a bushi's duel. The Asahina traditionally stay out of politics, just as they do war – directly participating in courtly games and maneuvers would force them to compromise too many of their principles. But they recognize the importance of politics to the success and prosperity of the Crane Clan, and they do not criticize the rest of the Clan for engaging in such activities.

Gi (Honesty): Honesty is a virtue which often suffers in the political arena, and this is one of several reasons why most Asahina avoid involvement in the courts. Although truthfulness with others is important, in the Asahina view the most vital aspect of Honesty is the need to be honest with oneself. If you are not honest with yourself, how can you have the courage to stand up for your beliefs, even in the face of criticism or opposition?

Yu (Courage): The Asahina have their own view of this quintessential warrior's virtue. To them, true courage is not the ability to face death or stand against your foes on the battlefield. Rather, it is the ability to stand for what you believe in, even if that belief goes against the policies of the Clan and brings bitter criticism. This principle is embraced equally by the majority of pacifist, isolationist Asahina and the minority of militant and political family members – in all cases, they uphold Courage as the virtue of sticking to one's principles.

Jin (Compassion): Compassion is respected by all Crane, but to the Asahina it is easily the most revered tenet of Bushido. It is the principle their family was

founded on, and they will do almost anything to maintain their adherence to it. In the Asahina view, Compassion is synonymous with pacifism, and their path of non-violence is thus a path completely compatible with Bushido. Indeed, many Asahina will not kill under any circumstances whatsoever, offering mercy even to the creatures of the Shadowlands.

Rei (Courtesy): Courtesy is regarded as a quintessential Crane virtue, and the Asahina are no exception to this. Although they do not actively seek visitors to their temples, they welcome any and all guests, and they take quiet pride in displaying manners as flawless as any Doji courtier's. Those few Asahina who embrace the path of politics are thus well-grounded in the most basic and important arts of diplomacy.

Meyo (Honor): Honor is the ultimate judge of one's actions, for it is an internal judge, forcing every samurai to confront his own soul. The Asahina embrace Honor as the proof of their own rightness in following their separate path. Since their own sense of Honor is secure, they are all but immune to any criticism which their isolationist ways might bring from others. It is this same fierce sense of Honor which makes it so difficult for most of the Asahina to involve themselves in politics, with its myriad compromises of principle.

Makoto (Sincerity): The Asahina, like all Crane, embrace Sincerity as essential to the Clan's ethic of perfection. Nothing should be said or done half-heartedly or without conviction, so the Asahina commit themselves whole-heartedly to their peaceful philosophies, pursuing them with the same complete dedication that other Crane devote to art, combat, or politics. Likewise, those few Asahina who choose to forsake their family's traditions do so with the same complete sincerity. An Asahina courtier speaks with the power of total conviction, knowing that she is fulfilling the traditions of the Crane.

Chugo (Duty): The Asahina have a somewhat different approach to Duty than other Cranes. While a Doji or Kakita probably sees Duty in the light of service to the Crane Clan, the Asahina see their highest duty as being to their family's founding principles – including, of course, the principles of Bushido, especially Compassion. This somewhat restricted view of Duty is the most frequent cause of disagreement among those dissident Asahina who choose to forsake the family's traditions – in their view, Duty demands a higher loyalty to Clan and Empire, rather than merely to philosophical tradition.

The Daidoji

"Let others have honor. We shall have victory."

– Daidoji Shihei

The Daidoji were born as an off-shoot from the Doji family, when Lady Doji's son Hayaku traveled into the Shadowlands alone, seeking out his sister, the first Crane Thunder, Konishiko. After he returned his sister's sword to her mother, he was granted control of the southern-most Crane lands and given the surname Daidoji, "Defender of the Doji." Even since, his descendants have sworn to protect their kinsmen no matter the cost. Consequently, they have followed a very different path from the rest of the Crane, embracing pragmatic and sometimes dishonorable methods in order to further the Clan's safety and success.

The most infamous example of the Daidoji family's strange methods, the Harriers, have now been disbanded by the command of Clan Champion Doji Domotai. However, while Domotai's order has brought an end to the most ruthlessly dishonorable of Daidoji methods, the family continues to embrace a highly pragmatic approach to both war and politics, and to carry out activities which the rest of the Crane Clan would find

distasteful if not downright dishonorable. It is often remarked that a Daidoji stands behind every successful Crane courtier, and this is not far from the truth. The members of the Daidoji Trading Council excel in the grubby business of commerce, ensuring the Crane Clan's legendary wealth remains unmatched even by the Mantis, while Daidoji spies slip through the Empire's courts, collecting the vital information which allows Crane courtiers to anticipate and outmaneuver their political foes.

It should be noted, however, that the Daidoji family is not as one-dimensionally villainous as it is sometimes portrayed. The Daidoji are still Crane, and some of them find ruthless and dishonorable methods too difficult to square with the Code of Bushido. For these samurai, the family offers more conventional and honorable duties, such as serving as yojimbo to courtiers and shugenja, or fighting in the ranks of the Crane armies as the famous Iron Crane.

Of all the Families in the Crane Clan, the Daidoji views on Bushido are the most unconventional. In the Daidoji view, it is their task to perform the difficult and painful jobs which the rest of the Clan cannot. By taking on these duties alone, staining only



their own souls with dishonor, the Daidoji keep the Asahina, Doji, and Kakita pure and honorable, able to lead the Crane Clan with unsullied grace. For a thousand years, the other Crane Families have quietly accepted this bargain with the Daidoji, averting their eyes from the often disgraceful methods employed by their cousins. Only now, with the ascension of Doji Domotai and her discovery and disbanding of the secret school of Harriers, has this begun to change.

To the Daidoji, far more than any of the other Families in the Crane Clan, there is little difference between politics and war, and in both fields of conflict they are willing to do what is required for victory. Duty, in the Daidoji view, trumps all other aspects of Bushido, and so long as they fulfill their duties to the Clan they will never be truly corrupt. It is quite possible that Doji Domotai's new policies may change this – indeed, the abolishment of the Harriers has already forced the Daidoji to adopt a somewhat more open position in the courts, and to accept a more honorable approach to their duties in consequence. But a thousand-year tradition is not easily set aside, and many of the Daidoji, especially their network of spies, remain in the role of the pragmatic underbelly of the otherwise honorable Crane Clan.

Gi (Honesty): The Daidoji have traditionally paid only lip service to the Virtue of Honesty. Their chosen fields of commerce, espionage, and unconventional battle tactics all rely on deception and misdirection to succeed. Although the outcome of the War of Silk and Steel has forced them to abandon the extreme tactics of the Harriers, many Daidoji remain dedicated to the uses and value of deception, and leave truth-telling to the Asahina and Kakita. Needless to say, this can make them quite effective politicians when they do choose to serve their Clan in court.

Yu (Courage): The Daidoji, as a family dominated by warriors, revere traditional battlefield courage more highly than other Crane Families. However, they also take a deeper, more philosophical view of Courage. To the Daidoji, the ability to do what must be done for the Clan – even if that is something dishonorable – is the true measure of courage, for it includes the courage to sacrifice one's own purity for the sake of the greater good of the Crane. It was this view of Courage which the Daidoji used to help justify their dubious tactics for so long. Ironically, however, it is this same view of Courage which has enabled them to accept Domotai's command to



disband the Harriers. To set aside the traditions of centuries is not done without great courage, after all.

Jin (Compassion): The Daidoji long ago hardened their hearts against the call of Compassion. In their view, protecting and caring for the heimin is a luxury which they cannot afford, and mercy for a weaker or defeated foe is only foolishness. Whether on the battlefield or in the courts, Daidoji are ready and willing to make any sacrifices – including the sacrifice of commoners they are charged to protect – in order to defeat their foes. The current war with the Crab has demonstrated that the Daidoji still embrace such views, even if they are no longer Harriers.

Rei (Courtesy): The Daidoji do not revere Courtesy as an end in itself in the way that other Crane do, but they certainly recognize its practical value, and employ it with skill when it suits their purposes. Here, as with much else, the Daidoji tend to be pragmatists, employing the traditions of civilization as cloaks for their activities.

Meyo (Honor): The Daidoji have an unhappy relationship with Honor, for they have long seen it as a virtue they must sacrifice for the greater good of the Crane Clan. Individual Daidoji are taught to be ready and willing to sacrifice their own personal honor whenever it is required. However, Doji Domotai's decree ending the Harriers has forced some Daidoji to reassess their relationship to Honor, and the family seems to be moving in the direction of a more honorable philosophy for the future.

Makoto (Sincerity): Much like Courtesy, the Daidoji tend to see Sincerity as a useful tool rather than a higher moral calling. The ability to appear sincere in public is extremely useful to spies and merchant patrons. Conversely, to not appear sincere would imperil the entire Daidoji family, and this cannot be allowed. The Daidoji do not revere Sincerity on a higher philosophical level, however – the Crane ideal of total commitment and perfection in all things is something the Daidoji family leaves to its more honorable Doji and Kakita cousins.

Chugo (Duty): If there is a Virtue which the Daidoji embrace whole-heartedly, it is Duty. In their view, everything they do, all the dishonorable and shameful tactics and skills they employ, are justified by their duty to the Clan. The Daidoji have always been prepared to do whatever is required, no matter the cost or danger

to themselves. Here again, however, their devotion to this Virtue has shown a double edge. Now that Doji Domotai has ordered them to forsake their most shameful tactics, their devotion to Duty has driven them to obey, rejecting those in their ranks who seek to evade her commands.

The Doji

"Perfect gift, or perfect cut: We are Doji."

– Doji Domotai

The Doji have always been the ruling family of the Crane, descended from their founding Kami. Lady Doji created the Empire's cultural, artistic, and social structures, and her descendents have shaped the ceremonies and protocol of Rokugani civilization ever since. Imperial politics follow the rhythms and patterns established by the Crane, and the Doji family takes pride in manipulating and controlling the system in ways that few others can match. The Doji specialize in building power through elaborate networks of favors, gifts, marriage arrangements, and other "soft" methods that seem weak and meaningless to martial Clans like the Lion or Crab – until that same network of favors brings massive political and economic pressure down on the enemies of the Crane. During the Hantei Dynasty, these methods were even more effective, since the Doji made sure the Hantei Emperors all took Crane women as their brides – a subtle but incomparable advantage for the Clan. Although this is no longer the case, the Doji remain a formidable political power in Rokugan, and the uncontested leaders of their Clan.

The Doji overall are an intensely honorable family, descended from a Kami renowned for her purity of spirit. However, they are also an intensely political family, one which serves its Clan predominantly in the courts. This means, inevitably, that they must accept a certain amount of compromise in their principles. The Doji regard this as part of their duty, and try to deal with it by following Bushido as closely as their courtly duties allow, living as honorably as possible. This in turn allows their Kakita and Asahina cousins to largely avoid such unpleasant compromises of ethics altogether. Within the Doji family, those samurai who cannot make such modest ethical compromises are encouraged to serve the Clan in other roles – in the Doji Magistrates, for example, or training in the Kakita schools. Recently, some younger and more idealistic Doji have also begun

developing a more "pure" and honorable approach to politics and diplomacy, the so-called Doji Innocents.

Gi (Honesty): In the Doji view, politics and diplomacy inherently conflict with truthfulness. An effective courtier must be able and willing to lie, persuasively and effectively, to both allies and enemies. Honesty is therefore seen as a Virtue which must be honored only when it does not conflict with a courtier's duties to the Clan. The Doji as a whole accept this as an unavoidable price of their service to the Crane, although the new group known as the Innocents rejects this compromise.

Yu (Courage): The Doji respect Courage as much as any samurai does, but their emphasis on political service means they take a more philosophical view of it than a bushi-dominated family. In the Doji view, it requires just as much courage to stand in court and resist the threats and blandishments of a Scorpion rival as it does to stand on the battlefield and face a charge of Matsu berserkers. In both cases, a samurai must confront and defeat his enemies without any thought of his own safety, whether physical or social.

Jin (Compassion): The Doji place a high value on Compassion, for they still revere the gentle spirit of their founder. Doji was one of the first Kami to care about the value and well-being of mortals, and her family still believes it is an important duty to look after the welfare of those beneath them. The Doji believe their political skills are well-suited to upholding Compassion, for any war brings misery to the commoners whose protection is a samurai's duty. A courtier who can end or avert a war through political maneuver will save countless lives and avert immeasurable suffering. Furthermore, offering mercy to a weak or helpless foe can make a new and powerful ally, giving Compassion a practical political value as well.

Rei (Courtesy): Courtesy is of all the Virtues the one most revered by the Doji. In their view, Courtesy is the foundation of Rokugani civilization, established and promulgated by Lady Doji herself, and it separates Rokugan from both the gaijin barbarians and the primitive tribes which pre-dated the Empire. A Crane who

fails to follow Courtesy is thus a Crane who forsakes what it truly means to be Rokugani, not to mention insulting the Clan's founder. It is Courtesy which allows the Clans to conduct diplomacy with honor and dignity, without needless violence, and a Doji will follow the rules of etiquette to the bitter end, even when speaking with a sworn enemy.

Meyo (Honor): Almost all of the Crane regard their honor highly, but the Doji, due to their need to occasionally compromise on issues of Honesty, place an especially high value on maintaining their overall sense of Honor. They also see their Honor as an important tool and weapon to use against their foes. The Doji have long made an art form out of making their political position synonymous with Honor itself, thereby forcing their opponents to back down. More ruthless Doji courtiers also rely on their own sense of Honor to question others' motives or to goad their enemies into duels they cannot win. By forcing a troublesome negotiating opponent into the position of questioning Crane Honor, the Doji can arrange to defeat them in a duel and win a significant political victory.

Makoto (Sincerity): Sincerity is one of the most important tenets of Bushido for the Doji family, ranking right behind Courtesy. At the most simplistic level, the ability to convey sincerity in every word and movement is a vital tool of politics. From a more philosophical viewpoint, the Doji see Sincerity as an essential element of the Crane ethic of perfection. A true samurai does everything with his whole heart, and the Doji believe this applies just as strongly to politics as to war. For a Doji to ever conduct himself in a casual or lackadaisical manner would be simply unthinkable.

Chugo (Duty): The Doji consider Duty to be a Virtue nearly as important as Courtesy and Sincerity, for it is through their honorable duty to the Crane Clan that they can justify their frequent bending (or breaking) of the truth. The Doji find both pride and honor in serving their Clan without hesitation or second thoughts, confronting any political or social challenge with all of their considerable skill.

The Nature of Diplomacy

Court, more than almost any other environment in Rokugan, shows how much importance the Empire places on maintaining appearances and keeping face. In public, what matters is appearances, perception, and the maintenance of propriety. To be publicly honest and forthright in Rokugan is, very often, to be rude. All that matters is perception, not truth. If a samurai is a drunken, gambling, womanizing wretch, the court doesn't care as long as he's discreet about it. By contrast, pointing out another's weakness embarrasses both them and you, bringing shame to his family and your own. Similarly, if a samurai presents himself as pious or honorable, the court accepts this as true as long as he properly upholds this image in public. The truth may be spoken about in gossip, but it is regarded for what it is: harmless gossip, to be ignored.

Although every court sees large assemblages of guests, most of the really important discussions and negotiations occur in privacy and secrecy. Very few guests at any court are ever privy to any true diplomatic sessions. Any significant and binding agreements are always made by meeting in private chambers, taking walks in secluded gardens, or eating meals alone with important ambassadors. An average samurai who inadvertently stumbles across one of these closed sessions is more likely to earn the enmity of the participants than to be able to make any contribution.

Seasoned courtiers who find themselves approached for serious negotiations in public view are typically very skeptical of the intentions of the other party. Often, such approaches are plots designed to ensnare the naïve or inexperienced in some dishonorable political scheme.

Those few samurai who are truly powerful enough to speak on behalf of their Clan at court must always be aware of the appropriate manner in which to do so. Even in dire circumstances, forthrightness is seldom considered a virtue by the Rokugani. Indirect language, hints, and veiled language are always the best way of indicating one's desires and intentions, for direct and open language is a sign of weakness and invites manipulation and betrayal. No proper courtier will ever ask something so blunt as, "Will you join our attack on the Unicorn Clan?" Instead, the preferred language is something like, "Our Clan must defend our honor by avenging the grievous insult done us by the Unicorn Clan. We know that you, too, have been treated dishonorably by those horse-riding barbarians. If our victory is quick and without great cost to our people, we would insist that they return to your Clan the land they took from your ancestors."

The Kakita

"There is no purpose in beauty. Beauty is its own purpose."

— Doji Kurohito

The Kakita family are born of Kakita and Lady Doji's third son, Shimizu. It was he who most understood his father's teachings and passions, and his descendants follow in his footsteps, embracing the ways of iaijutsu and artistry. Having chosen this path, the Kakita have largely forsaken politics, leaving matters of court to their Doji cousins. Instead, the Kakita pursue perfection and art. Their family's artisans, respected and admired through the Empire, consider themselves the soul of Rokugan; they depict every major battle and historical event in art, song, and poetry, bring beauty into every court, and recount the ancient myths and legends of the Empire. Their duelists carry the art of the iaijutsu duel to its finest expression. The Kakita as a whole, both artisans and duelists, follow the ultimate philosophy of the Crane most closely: you only live once, and perfection requires only one attempt. If you are perfect, honorable, and pure, your every move will also be perfect. Even the notorious Kakita Jesters, whose



task is to mock and expose the failings of others, do so with the same dedication as any other Kakita.

More than any other family of the Crane, the Kakita seek to embrace all of the virtues of Bushido equally – showing a certain similarity to some of their ancient rivals in the Lion Clan. Because of this idealized view, the Kakita try to avoid the ways of politics, leaving such unpleasant but necessary duties to the Doji. Instead, they serve the Clan through their mastery of dueling and art – fields where perfection may be pursued with honor, without any need for compromise. Occasionally, however, a Kakita will choose to serve his Clan in the courts, training under the Doji sensei, and when this happens they embrace the ways of politics with the same dedicated perfection they apply to any other field. During the time of the Clan War, for example, the Imperial court was dominated by Chancellor Kakita Yoshi, a Crane whose mastery of politics remains legendary to this day.

Gi (Honesty): Unlike the Doji, most Kakita refuse to compromise even slightly on the principle of Honesty. They take pride in being strictly honest and refusing to falsify themselves in any way. However, because they also venerate the other Virtues (especially Courtesy), the Kakita do not make a custom of speaking impolitic

truths. This allows them to avoid committing breaches of etiquette in court, although they still leave the real work of politics to the Doji.

Yu (Courage): The Kakita are one of the Crane Clan's bushi Families, so it is to be expected they will think highly of courage. However, from their perspective, there is far more to courage than mere physical bravery. In order for a Kakita to throw himself wholeheartedly into the pursuit of a perfect strike or a perfect piece of art, he must be completely unafraid of failure, clear of any self-doubts. Any faltering of courage will mean failure, a fate intolerable to a true Kakita.

Jin (Compassion): Although the Kakita share the general Crane emphasis on showing proper consideration for those heimin in their care, they tend to be more distant from such concerns than the Doji or the Asahina. The Kakita pursue their own artistry so single-mindedly that they often have little time to consider the plight of the heimin. Likewise, their emphasis on perfect success in both dueling and art makes them unlikely to offer mercy to a defeated foe.

Rei (Courtesy): Like the Doji, the Kakita place an extremely high value on courtesy, and take pride in upholding the rules of etiquette with grace and skill. No proper Kakita would ever choose to be rude or insulting



The Crane Art of Politics

to anyone, even a bitter enemy, for to do so would be to dishonor himself.

Meyo (Honor): While the Doji preserve their Honor by fulfilling their duties to the Crane (even if that requires the occasional moral compromise), the Kakita embrace Honor by following all the virtues of Bushido with the same purity and relentless perfection as they pursue their art. A true Kakita will never allow himself to commit any dishonorable act. The family's strict beliefs, imbued from early childhood, ensure that every Kakita stands firm guard over his own honor – those Kakita who fall to the lure of dishonorable behavior are few indeed.

Makoto (Sincerity): Much like the Doji, the Kakita view Sincerity in far more expansive terms than merely as speaking persuasively. Sincerity is something which infuses everything a Kakita does. From the perfection of art to the cadences of speech, a Kakita always acts with complete conviction, utterly sure of himself and his honor. No true Kakita would ever offer a half-hearted artistic performance or a casual duel. This makes the Kakita a vital asset to the Doji in the courts of the Empire, for any gift offered by a Kakita artisan will be truly flawless, and any duel fought by a Kakita bushi will be a perfect victory.

Chugo (Duty): The Kakita view Duty as upholding the traditions of their founder. A Kakita who fails to pursue his art with absolute devotion is a Kakita who is failing his duty to his Clan and his ancestors. In the Kakita family's view, the relentless pursuit of perfection in art is the highest possible service they can offer to the Crane, and indeed to the Empire itself. Hence, on those rare occasions when a Kakita follows the path of politics, he does so with the same devotion his family brings to all its endeavors.

The Yasuki

The Crane Yasuki family are not truly a family in the same sense as the Doji, Kakita, Asahina, or Daidoji. Many of the family's members are actually Daidoji who changed their name when Daidoji Hachi was proclaimed the family daimyo. The rest are Crab Yasuki who changed allegiance for the same reason. Consequently, the Crane Yasuki do not have a unified philosophy or approach to politics. To the extent that they do, it is comparable to that of the Daidoji – a pragmatic approach which tends to forsake the ideals of Bushido in favor of accomplishing unpleasant work for the Clan.

The rules of Rokugani politics were to a large degree created by Lady Doji, and it should be no surprise that the Crane have always thrived under them. Those who do not follow the rules of court are shamed and ostracized, so the other Clans have no choice but to play the game in the way the Crane desire – to participate in the elaborate, endlessly-ramifying networks of alliances, favors, and gifts which the Crane cultivate with the elaborate care an artisan might lavish on a bonsai tree. This ensures the Crane always have doors open in every Clan, whatever the current political climate.

Although most of the Crane find commerce distasteful, they are aware of its value in reinforcing their political maneuvers. They are the only Clan which consistently, year after year, enjoys a surplus of rice, and this gives them considerable leverage to employ against less fortunate Clans. In addition, the Daidoji Trading Council gives the Crane Clan considerable knowledge of the ebb and flow of coin in the Empire, and allows them to manipulate such things to their advantage.

THE CRAB CLAN

The Crane take a dim view of the Crab Clan. In their view, the Crab have devoted themselves so thoroughly to the battle against the Shadowlands that they have forgotten how to be civilized, forgotten what being Rokugani truly means, and can only snarl and strut like dogs. Although the Crane recognize intellectually that the Crab must sacrifice culture in order to protect the Empire, in their heart of hearts they simply cannot fathom the Crab Clan's rejection of art, civility, and beauty. Thus, relations between these two Clans have seldom remained cordial for long – a problem exacerbated by the long-running feud over the Yasuki family, which has recently erupted into war once again.

In the courts the Crane hold a huge advantage over the Crab, for few of Hida's Clan are truly at home in such a place. The Crane find the best way to deal with the Crab in court is not to attack them directly but simply to point out their flaws and mistakes to others. If

the Crab ignore these insults, they allow them to stand unchallenged, but if they try to reply, they usually come across as blundering, temperamental fools. Either way, the Crab are soon left isolated and helpless, leaving only the hated Crane available to “help” them... for a suitable price.

The Crane Clan's food surpluses also give considerable leverage against the Crab, who have few lands suitable for growing food and a large standing army that must be fed. The Crane can often force concessions from the Crab with only the threat of cutting off rice shipments. Subtler economic maneuvers, such as manipulating rice prices or disrupting trade networks, can also be effective against the Crab, although the Crab Yasuki are skilled enough in such matters to sometimes strike back in kind.

THE DRAGON CLAN

The Dragon Clan has always been something of a mystery to the Crane. The Dragon have spent much of their history hidden away on their mountains, contemplating the rest of Rokugan, and when they do join the Empire's political and military affairs they often do so in strange and inexplicable ways. This unpredictable behavior can make hash of any Crane hope for a consistent political strategy. The recent War of Silk and Steel is a striking example – in truth, the Dragon launched the war to preserve the honor of the Crane, but did so without explaining themselves. The Crane were left in confusion, struggling to find a way to end a war they did not understand. In the end, it took a direct meeting between the Crane and Dragon Champions to resolve the conflict, and most Crane Clan samurai remain mystified as to the cause and nature of the war.

The Dragon are no less strange in court. What causes one Dragon discomfort may not bother the next in the slightest, and a valued favor for one Dragon might be irrelevant to another, so a consistent political strategy is near-impossible. Furthermore, although the Dragon claim to revere both honor and enlightenment, they seem just as willing to seek the friendship of a Clan like the barbarian Unicorn or the sinister Scorpion as the honorable Crane. Because of this, Crane courtiers have learned to approach Dragons on a case by case basis – evaluating each member of the Clan on his own merits rather than on what has come before.

The Dragon, like the Crab, have some difficulty feeding themselves. This is one of the few things all Dragons can agree on – rock does not make a good place to grow rice. Thus, the Crane have been able to use economic leverage against the Dragon with some effect in the past. However, here too the Dragon are distressingly unpredictable – during the War of Silk and Steel, for example, they unexpectedly received significant food assistance from the Unicorn Clan.

THE LION CLAN

At present, the Lion and the Crane are allied in both the battlefield and the courts, thanks in large part to the late Doji Kurohito's efforts to end the millennium-long feud between the two Clans. However, the Crane know a thousand years of enmity is not easily set aside, and should the Lion become their enemies once again, they will be more than ready to deal with them. Even as allies, the Crane often find themselves wishing the Lion would recognize the Crane Clan's duty to the Empire is just as important – if not as martially glorious – as the Right Hand's military service.

The Crane see the Lion as extremely rigid and tradition-bound, making them one of the easiest and at the same time most frustrating Clans to deal with in the courts. They are predictable to a fault, in both their initial views and how they react to any given situation, and therefore easy to manipulate into the position the Crane need. A skilled Crane courtier can lead a Lion to almost any emotional state he might desire. Unfortunately, the predictable Lion are also easily one of the most predictably stubborn Clans in the Empire, and if they refuse to accept a political position, they cannot be budged – no matter what the Crane might try. Thus, the Crane must always be careful to maneuver against the Lion in such a way that their stubborn resistance can only serve to harm themselves.

Economic measures against the Lion can also be quite effective. Although the Lion lands are fertile, they are simply too small to fully support the huge armies which the Right Hand of the Emperor must field. Thus, during past clashes the Crane have sometimes been able to bring huge Lion offensives to a halt with a simple trade embargo.

The Crane make a practice of sending their newest and least-experienced courtiers to the courts of the Lion for their first assignment. If they prove themselves



adept at dealing with the Lion in the Lion courts, the Crane will consider moving them to bigger and better appointments. After all, if a courtier can't handle the Lion, how can he possibly prevail against the Scorpion or the Otomo?

THE MANTIS CLAN

The Mantis are an ancient Clan, born from a mix of Crab sentimentalities and Lion tempers, but it is only in the last half-century that they have been accepted as a Great Clan, and they remain deeply conscious of their origins and their past. The Crane realize there is nothing the Mantis desire more than to be fully accepted into Rokugani society, to be recognized as *belonging* with the Great Clans. This gives them an inferiority complex they call ambition, causing them to often reach beyond their means. Such weaknesses feed perfectly into the strength of the Crane – as the ultimate arbiters of what is acceptable in court, the Crane can offer the Mantis the respect and face they so desperately crave.

Although this would seem to make the Mantis and Crane natural long-term allies, such has not proven to be the case. The insecurity and sheer ambition of the

Mantis makes them vulnerable to appeals from many quarters, and while they will never betray a debt, nevertheless they can be difficult Clan to keep as long-term allies. Also, the Mantis are an extremely wealthy Clan, so the Crane Clan's traditional commercial advantages afford little to no leverage against them.

It does not help matters that Crane courtiers tend to look down on individual Mantis as being crude and thuggish, as ignorant of the courts as a Crab and as easily manipulated as a Lion. This is not always an accurate assessment, to be sure, and as the Mantis continue to grow in experience in the courts, the Crane will soon be forced to develop more sophisticated strategies for dealing with them. The current dynastic struggle for the throne of Rokugan is already forcing them to take steps down this path, and the more far-sighted among the Crane are working to pull the Mantis into their network of favors and personal alliances.

THE PHOENIX CLAN

The Crane tend to view the Phoenix Clan as being very similar to themselves – a Clan of civilized, artistic, and honorable samurai, dedicated to upholding all that is

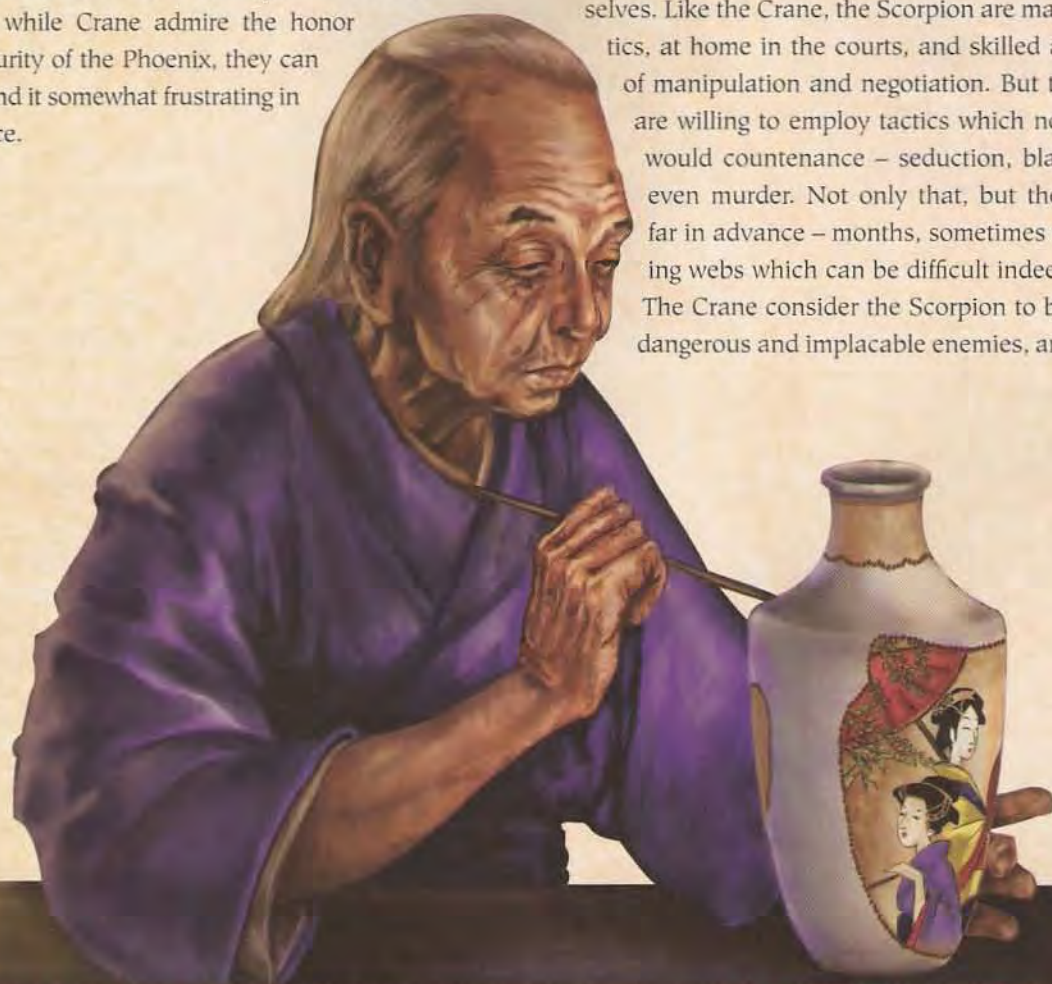
best in the Empire. Thus they have always tended to view the Phoenix as natural friends and allies. This view is not wholly incorrect, for the Phoenix Clan's dedication to peace has often placed it on the same side as the Crane when dealing with more martial Clans such as the Lion and Crab. Furthermore, the founding of the Asahina family through the marriage of Isawa Asahina and Doji Kiriko created strong philosophical ties between both Clans' shugenja, creating an instinctive sympathy of outlook.

From the standpoint of political maneuver, however, the Phoenix can be difficult to deal with. The typical Phoenix are not only honorable but highly spiritual, delving deep into matters of religion and enlightenment, more apt to listen to the wisdom of the Fortunes and the Kami than to consider what is in their political best interest. Although this protects them well against the malicious schemes and manipulations of the Scorpion, it also makes them less likely to be influenced by the Crane Clan's methods of favors, gifts, personal alliances and matchmaking arrangements. Likewise, the Crane Clan's economic leverage has little impact on a Clan which can entreat the Kami to ensure good harvests. Thus, while Crane admire the honor and purity of the Phoenix, they can also find it somewhat frustrating in practice.

The Crane have found over the centuries that their best method of dealing with the Phoenix is to point their attentions at the Crane's enemies. More than most Clans, the Phoenix are prone to acting on what they believe is the best and most honorable course, regardless of the political consequences – a tendency epitomized by the forced truce they imposed on the Imperial capital of Toshi Ranbo at the end of the Khan's attack. Therefore, the Crane work to always convince the Phoenix of their own righteousness and of the dishonorable intentions of their enemies. This can occasionally backfire – the Phoenix do not take well to being manipulated, should they realize it – but for the most part it is a strategy which has served the Crane well. The magic of a single Isawa can be worth a hundred samurai, and the Winter of Red Snow is only the most recent of many wars ended over the centuries by the intervention of the Phoenix.

THE SCORPION CLAN

The Crane view the Scorpion as a dark mirror of themselves, as something they could easily become if they fall from the pillar of Honor they have built for themselves. Like the Crane, the Scorpion are masters of politics, at home in the courts, and skilled at every sort of manipulation and negotiation. But the Scorpion are willing to employ tactics which no true Crane would countenance – seduction, blackmail, and even murder. Not only that, but they lay plans far in advance – months, sometimes years – casting webs which can be difficult indeed to escape. The Crane consider the Scorpion to be their most dangerous and implacable enemies, and send only



their most skilled and capable courtiers against them. Younger or less capable courtiers are warned off from tangling too freely with the Scorpion, lest they stumble into pits too deep to extricate themselves.

When possible, the Crane prefer to not have to deal directly with the Scorpion at all. Instead, they seek to remain on the defensive and contain their enemy's political attacks, while working elsewhere to enlist the rest of the court against them. Given that the Scorpion Clan's methods rely so heavily on dishonorable and manipulative means, the Crane believe their own tools of gifts, favors, and artistry can sway more of the courts to their own side. Although the Crane always strive to keep their hands clean and their honor pure, they do so with especial attention when dealing with the Scorpion, for the slightest mistake can make them vulnerable to manipulation. Despite the Clan's best efforts, more than one Crane has been publicly destroyed by a Scorpion seduction.

The Crane do not, of course, exclude the Scorpion from their networks of favors and gift exchanges. However, they are especially careful to make sure that such exchanges of favors always leave them with the advantage, or at worst even. Having a Scorpion indebted to you is a powerful weapon in the courts, but being indebted to a Scorpion can lead only to disaster, as the debt will never do anything but grow.

THE SPIDER CLAN

As yet, the Crane know little of the mysterious groups of ronin who have claimed the title of Spider Clan. This is not the first time an upstart ronin band has tried to claim status as a Clan, and the Crane generally pay little to no need to such activities. Should such a "Clan" actually gain recognition from the Emperor, the Crane will afford it the respect it deserves – until that time, it is nothing more than a pack of wave-men, with no power and no importance.

Of course, such neglect is not without risks. The Spider have shown a knack for ruthless and seductive politics which even the Scorpion might envy, if they were aware of its true nature. A few Crane have fallen into the web of Spider influence, often without even realizing it. Some of the wiser heads among the Crane Clan have begun to pay closer attention to these upstart ronin, and to make plans for dealing with them if their power proves greater than anticipated.

THE UNICORN CLAN

Ever since the Unicorn returned to Rokugan in 815, the Crane have sought to treat them as friends. Indeed, it was the Crane who helped the Unicorn deliver Shinjo's fan to the Imperial Court, ensuring the Clan would be recognized as the true descendents of the Ki-Rin. It was also the Crane who helped teach the Unicorn how Rokugan operated, happily supplying everything the Unicorn needed to know. In return, the Unicorn regularly sided with the Crane in both court and on the battlefield. As recently as the start of the Clan War, the Unicorn and Crane Clans were firm allies, standing against the Scorpion and the Lion. Since the return of the Moto, however, relations between the two Clans have begun to cool, as the ambitions of the Khan have taken the Unicorn down a path of confrontation with the Empire's traditionalists – the Crane among them.

The single tenet of Bushido that the Unicorn value above all others is Honesty. This is evident in the tactics their courtiers embrace, for they refuse to understand that duplicity is a part of politics. The Crane have always taken advantage of this peculiar trait whenever they could, using it both to learn information and to spread rumors. Now that their relations with the Unicorn are more hostile than not, they find this seemingly naïve honesty a useful weapon to turn against the Ki-Rin, tricking and outmaneuvering their earnest diplomats, or directing their wrath against other Clans. The Crane know much of the Empire still sees the Unicorn as strange barbarians who understand little of true culture and civility, and they make sure the Unicorn know it as well. They, however, can offer the Unicorn the respect of being treated equally, of being integrated into the political system of gifts and favors.

The Crane have begun working to create divisions between the Unicorn Families, sympathizing with the Shinjo and Ide while attacking the Moto as treacherous thugs and barbarians. In this way, they hope to maintain their avenues of friendship with the Unicorn Clan while still resisting the ambitions of the Khan. They also use their economic resources to try to bring pressure against the Unicorn armies, although this is less successful against the wealthy Unicorn than it could be against a Clan like the Crab or Lion.

THE IMPERIAL FAMILIES

The Crane have a deep respect for the Imperial Families, especially the Otomo – not only due to their station, but also for their skill in the courts. They know that if anyone is a greater master of the courts than they, it is the Imperials, and so they must tread lightly and be sure never to give offense. They also know that with the recent upheavals in the Empire's political world, the power and prestige of the Imperial Families are more valuable than ever. The Crane have traditionally always maintained good relations with the Imperials, and in these troubled times they are willing to go to great lengths to maintain that friendship. It was the Crane, for example, who provided the land, wealth, and resources for the Otomo to build their new palace.

The Crane never treat the Imperials with less than supreme respect, and are always willing to answer any request for help or assistance. Within the context of the overall Crane favor network, they always treat the Imperials with special courtesy, often performing favors for them with no expectation of reward, simply to maintain good relations. Nor do they make any effort to exert economic pressure against the Imperials, for there is really no way for them to do so.

THE MINOR CLANS

Although the Crane do not concern themselves overmuch with individual Minor Clans, they do recognize that these small Clans are not without a certain power and influence. Though the Minor Clans cannot become great allies or great enemies, they can be useful friends, and the Crane believe they can never have too many friends. They have often enjoyed especially good relations with their distant cousins in the Sparrow Clan, a tendency which is certainly true today, and Crane courtiers regularly visit the modest Sparrow court. The Crane have not hesitated to build friendships with the other Minor Clans as well, of course, and they also see the potential inherent in the concept of the Minor Clan Alliance. The Crane make a point of sending ambassadors to the Alliance's new hub at Kudo Mura. They do not worry about any real threat from the Alliance, however – they know that if a song becomes troublesome, remove one note and it will collapse.

Influencing the Minor Clans is not a difficult matter for the Crane, for such small and weak Clans are constantly in need of favors and gifts, simply to maintain

any kind of position in the courts. Likewise, the wealth of the Crane affords them great leverage against small, poor Clans like the Sparrow, Oriole, Hare, and Dragonfly.

Politics: The Ways of the Crane

Matchmaking

Marriage in Rokugan is usually a business matter, and is typically arranged (a process called *mi-ai*) by the parents of the couple, often with the help of a middleman or a professional matchmaker known as a *Nakado*. Such marriages are used to seal bargains or alliances between Clans and Families, and it is not expected for the couple to be in love, or even know one another. Although these customs are common in all of Rokugan's Clans, the Crane have always been particularly adept at the art of arranging useful, successful, and politically effective marriages. Crane samurai, both men and women, are famous for both their beauty and their talent, so arranging a marriage to a Crane can be a great coup for a samurai from another Clan, especially a samurai of lesser station. The Crane exploit this to expand their network of favors across the Empire. It works equally well at the highest levels of the courts, since arranging a Crane bride for a prominent daimyo will ensure that his wife is always ready to plead her old Clan's interests to her husband. Indeed, during the Hantei Dynasty the Crane saw to it that every Hantei Emperor was married to a Crane bride, meaning that each Emperor would receive pro-Crane advice from both his wife and his mother.

One of the most basic purposes of each year's Winter Court, in point of fact, is to bring people together in marriages that create alliances and cement bargains for the following year. What better way to assure trust than through a well-arranged marriage? Fathers and mothers of noble lineage always bring their most gifted children to whichever Winter Court they manage to attend, hoping they will catch some royal eye. Here again, the Crane excel, making sure they always bring the most beautiful and talented children to each court. Samurai

seek pairings which can better their family's station, increase their lands or prestige, or cement some long-term political or personal goal through blood ties. Typically, marriages arranged at Winter Court are performed at that court, or during the following spring.

Mi-ai traditionally begins with a formal interview between the parents of the prospective bride and groom. The age of the children involved varies widely. In highly political families, mi-ai often begins when the two are mere infants. On other occasions, they may be much older, even as much as several years past their *gempukku*. Neither of the parties regard the mi-ai interview as an immediate guarantee of marriage – rather, these preliminary meetings are done to make sure both sides are comfortable with a future pairing, ensuring an ultimately successful union. If the two families live far apart, a Nakado or other go-between may be enlisted to help ferry messages and gifts back and forth.

Typically, there is little consultation with the wishes of the children involved – they are expected to willingly serve their family and Clan by marrying as their parents direct. Indeed, in the case of high-profile political marriages, their family daimyo or even the Clan Champion may step in, ordering them to marry for the good of the Clan. However, if the participating children are well into adulthood, they may be allowed to help arrange their own marriage, and adult samurai of significant political power can sometimes take full control over their own choice of spouse.

Cultural Option: The Role of Women

"Samurai maidens who remain faithful to their lords get their names in history books. The ones who fall find their names in tragic love songs."

– Doji Shizue

In the the Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Third Edition, gender is depicted as having only minimal impact on Rokugani society and culture. This is the "default" version of Rokugan and the one portrayed in all official storylines and materials. However, some players and GMs may wish to run a game which draws more heavily on the historical cultures which helped inspire Rokugan – and in those cultures, gender roles were much stricter. It should be noted that this option is not

for everyone. It should only be undertaken with the full understanding and agreement of all the players involved, since the depiction of antique gender roles and social expectations can easily be seen by some as offensive.

If this cultural option is used, the position of women in Rokugan becomes somewhat more complex. A woman's caste – not her gender – still determines her position in the Celestial Order. Women are equal to men as far as caste; however, in other ways, there are several differences and inequalities. These are especially notable for women who serve as bushi. These women, known as *samurai-ko*, will find their lives are an often frustrating balancing act between their roles as bushi and their roles as women.

Samurai-ko are normally treated with the deference due a lady of their station, ignoring their role as bushi unless they are dressed and prepared for war. Conversely, if a *samurai-ko* is dressed in military gear, she is referred to with her military title instead of her social title. *Samurai-ko* do have all the rights of men, including the ability to rule a house or land, speak for their Clan, and go to war on behalf of their daimyo. They are not restricted in their actions in any way – so long as they dress and act appropriately. However, *samurai-ko* are also female, and there are many social conventions to which female members of the samurai caste are expected to conform. While *samurai-ko* may not be perfect court ladies, they are still expected to follow these rules of behavior when they are not on the battlefield.

For example, women are traditionally expected to speak more softly than men, to use smaller gestures and motions, and to move more slowly. Unmarried women are not allowed to be alone with men, and thus *samurai-ko* must often burden themselves with an "honor retainer" or a family member who follows them around, making sure they obey all social conventions and are never alone with a man who might taint their virtue. Needless to say, many *samurai-ko* find such rules deeply burdensome and frustrating.

Many traditionalist Clans and Families expect their *samurai-ko* to take a vow of celibacy during

their gempukku ceremony. This is done in the belief that a samurai-ko cannot be devoted to both her daimyo and to a lover or husband. If a celibate samurai-ko is found to have a lover, she often has no choice but to either commit seppuku or, more frequently, to renounce her station and join a monastery as a nun. Of course, many samurai-ko do take lovers, and the poetry and stories of Rokugan are full of the legends of samurai-ko who doomed themselves for love. Of course, a samurai-ko who can keep her indiscretions hidden will not suffer such tragic results.

Once a samurai-ko marries, unless she is a daimyo or other person of significant rank, she is expected to take over the duty of running her household. This is a tradition dating from the time of Lady Doji, who ran her household while Kakita went out to wage war against the forces of Fu Leng. However, in Rokugan, "running a household" means significantly more than one might expect. The wife (or, in the Moshì or Utaku Families, the husband) handles all of the money and is in charge of the household in every respect. In such a household, the male samurai is given a stipend by his wife. He is allowed to spend this stipend in any way he wishes, but the wife has absolute control over how the rest of the money is to be allocated. She manages the family's finances, hires workers to repair and improve the house and grounds, sees to it that any retainers receive their own stipends, and handles all of the entertainment for visitors. In game terms, this is a use of the Commerce skill, but in this context it is considered a High skill, and does not cost the spouse honor or reputation. To the contrary, a spouse who maintains a well-run and prosperous household is regarded with respect.

Correspondence and the Game of Letters

Courtiers in Rokugan spend much time and effort each day in composing and sending letters to each other. A skilled courtier will maintain a steady flow of correspondence with dozens of people from across the Empire, dropping small tidbits of information to them and carefully reviewing the snippets of gossip they send him in return. For many courtiers, this network of cor-

respondents can just as important, perhaps even more important, than the allies made in any particular court. Correspondence can build an alliance that lasts generations or begin a feud that lasts centuries. Indeed, a timely piece of information from the far side of the Empire can turn the entire course of negotiations, and a courtier's fame and fortune can be founded, built, or shattered by a single letter.

Within the courts themselves, critics and blackmailers alike employ letters as their weapon of choice, and lovers use them as their most subtle but most direct gift. This continual flow of correspondence within a court is known as the "Game of Letters," and it may be fairly said that such letters are in fact the blood of the court, carrying gossip and wit to every guest. Unlike letters sent and from to those outside court, they are designed primarily to display skill and to manipulate others, rather than to convey information. And as with nearly all things associated with court, the Crane are masters of the art, indeed the ones who define it for all the other Clans. They study and pursue the "Game of Letters" with the same attention and focus they apply to all the rest of their duties. The Game is quite ancient, and tales claim that Hantei Genji, the Shining Prince, was one of its most skilled early practitioners. Many of the letter-writing conventions embraced by modern courtiers are believed to have been first developed and established by him.

Writing a letter for court is not as simple as it may appear. A courtly letter is not written casually, in the manner of a letter to a friend, or brusquely, as a commander might dictate orders for his troops. Rather, the composition must be undertaken with precision and careful calculation, following a strict set of rules but exploiting those rules to amuse, confound, lure, entice, or provoke the recipient – or perhaps to achieve all of those effects at once. Every part of the letter has significance, both in itself and symbolically, from the choice of paper to the manner of delivery. Truly skilled Crane correspondents can work profound meaning into the tiniest details of their letters.

First, the choice of paper is tremendously important. The color of the paper establishes mood, conveying a particular emotion to the reader. The texture and thickness of the paper can convey information as well – a thick, heavy paper suggests serious matters, while a thin tissue conveys a light-hearted or romantic mood.

The size of the paper relative to the writing is also significant. For example, using a large piece of paper to convey a short message suggests generosity or extravagance, while a small piece of paper crowded with writing conveys a subtle insult, suggesting the recipient is not worthy of more paper.

Second, of course, is the content itself. Traditional compositions for the Game of Letters follow a strict structure, a thirty-one syllable poem based on an image from nature. This conveys the author's intent indirectly, much in the way that courtiers approach each other with indirect language during their negotiations. Although this form of letter is partly just a matter of upholding tradition, it also has a more practical value. Letters sent in court are almost never sealed, and any samurai can stop a servant in the halls and read what he is carrying. In fact, most courtiers take it for granted that their letters will be read by persons other than those to whom they are ultimately addressed. Thus, their contents are designed to display the courtier's wit and skill to everyone who reads them, rather than to communicate secrets. Skilled recipients can understand the letter even when the message is stated in the most indirect possible language, and this is intentional.

Third, the author must consider the brushwork. Like everything else in the letter, this conveys a message of its own, one that can be entirely at variance with the actual contents. An elegantly written message, each brush-stroke precise and flawless, could symbolize love or other deep care, or could simply be a way of showing off the writer's skills and capabilities. Conversely, messy or uneven brush-work can suggest a lack of emotional control, or can be seen as an insult, suggesting the author does not care enough about the recipient to offer his best work. Most courtiers compose their letters several times to make sure they get the exact effect they want from their calligraphy.

Finally, the courtier must consider packaging. Roku-gan has several traditional styles of letter-folding, often quite elaborate, and some Clans have developed their own signature styles to show off their skills and discourage forgeries. Scorpion Clan courtiers are especially skilled at folding letters in ways that are fiendishly difficult to open without tearing. Again, different manners of folding convey different things – a casually folded letter suggests a lack of care on who reads it, while an elaborate folding implies great significance to the contents. Once the letter is folded, it is typically attached



to a small object, such as a flower, a sprig from a tree, a stick of incense, or some other object, always something with a characteristic odor. The choice of what object and what odor is, of course, part of the message, and encapsulates the theme of the letter.

Even the choice of which servant will deliver the letter has its own meaning. An important servant implies that the recipient is also important. A minor servant implies that the recipient is of little note. Naturally, letters are never delivered personally, since that would defeat the whole point of the game.

All courtiers are familiar with the Game of Letters, since it is a widespread and important part of court life. Dealing effectively with the Game is taken extremely seriously, especially at major courts such as the Imperial Winter Court. Each letter must receive a reply, since otherwise the recipient is admitting the author's superior wit. A single game will often continue for the entire duration of winter, and a single courtier can easily have a dozen correspondences continuing at once.

The combinations of paper, scent, style of poem, and accompanying item used in the Game of Letters are almost infinite. For example, an expression of love might be written on soft, rose-colored paper, with a poem comparing the recipient's beauty to a favored animal or flower, and be accompanied by a sprig of oak, implying the author's love is strong. Conversely, a letter imputing cowardice to a Crab bushi might be written on thick white paper (white, the color of death), with a poem describing a thick-witted crustacean drowning in its own shell, and be scented with bitter almonds. Not surprisingly, a skilled courtier with extensive training and experience in the Game of Letters can often guess the intent of a message without even opening it.

The Subtlety of the Court

The Subtlety of the Court was written in 689 by an Imperial matchmaker named Otomo Madoko. It is a treatise on how the *Book of Sun Tao*, the Empire's most famous work of military strategy, can be applied to political tactics in court. The book was seen as revolutionary in its time, transforming how everyone viewed political conflict. Since then, it has been widely used as a survival guide to the courts, especially for non-courtier samurai who don't feel at home there.

Playing the Game of Letters: Mechanical Considerations

In game terms, one of these "duels of letters" can begin with the character either sending a letter or receiving one. Many skills can be useful in the Game of Letters, although the most obviously applicable include Calligraphy, Courtier, Etiquette, and Storytelling. However, the most basic skill used is a simple one: Games: Letters. When composing and sending a letter for the Game, a roll of Awareness/Games: Letters determines how skillfully and effectively the letter conveys the intended meaning. Rolls with other skills, at TNs determined by the GM, can be used to earn gain Free Raises on the Games: Letters roll.

It is sometimes possible to use Courtier School Techniques in a letter, but this should be at the GM's discretion, depending on which technique is being used and how the character is trying to execute it. (For example, the Doji Courtier Rank Four technique could probably be used through a letter, and the Bayushi Courtier Rank Three technique potentially could be used as well, although it would probably require a series of several letters to function properly.)

Each letter in the Game gives the recipient the option to "raise the stakes" by increasing the complexity of the message. This can be represented mechanically by attempting to call Raises against the TN attained by the previous Games: Letters roll. If a courtier receives a letter which made TN 25, and replies with a TN of 15, she is admitting she's not as clever as the sender. Conversely, if she writes a reply which made a TN of 30, she's proving she is even more clever, and the stakes are raised. Of course, there are times when raising the stakes is not the best option. If a Clan Champion sends you a letter, you would be well advised to reply with a letter which is no better than his, since to do otherwise is to insult him with your arrogance (if you raise the stakes) or your lack of care (if you send a noticeably inferior reply).

"Only the ignorant fight to win. The enlightened win before they fight." A wise courtier does not confront an opponent in ignorance. It is better to allow a foe a minor

Paper

Every Clan in Rokugan, every district and city, has its own expert paper-makers, men and women who specialize in the fine art of making rice paper, or washi. Among the Rokugani, high quality paper is nearly as esteemed as high quality silk. Every self-respecting samurai wants only the best paper for his calligraphy. Sending an official message or other diplomatic correspondence on cheap, poor-quality paper is an insult, suggesting the sender does not esteem the recipient enough to use fine quality paper. On the other hand, a samurai who literally cannot afford good paper can only further harm his own reputation by sending letters on cheap paper.

Within the highest ranks of society, especially in political environments such as the major courts, a fierce if rarely acknowledged rivalry exists over paper. When every word and action has triple meanings, even paper can start wars. The quality of a samurai's paper, whether used for letters, walls, or lamps, is a sign of his or her place in the world. Many Clans have paper made with subtle or even invisible dyes mixed in with the raw pulp, or place barely visible watermarks of their Clan mon on each sheet. Since paper is expensive, re-use is quite common, and proud samurai guard their own paper so closely that they enchant their documents to self-combust should anyone else try to write over them.

"If you can go no further, change. You will get through." An effective courtier will always keep the attention of the court and draw it away from any dangerous topic. Gossip and amusing tales, preferably on topics like war, romance, or the shortcomings of others, are always good ways to distract the court from an undesirable conversation. Telling a joke at one's own expense is an acceptable tactic, for a courtier should be willing to unhesitatingly sacrifice his dignity for the Clan in the same way that a warrior sacrifices his life.

"Deadly ground is where only the quick survive. When on deadly ground, fight." In the Emperor's Court, every courtier should be prepared at all times to destroy his foes and promote his own greatness. Everyone is an enemy, for when the Emperor's attention lies on another, one's own light dims. There is no room for mercy in court.

"The victorious general strikes while the enemy plans." A courtier must always be thinking, planning, and learning, even when he appears outwardly lethargic.

From the moment he arrives at court, he must be learning the names and affiliations of everyone present,

victory in order to buy time to research his background and weaknesses.

"True knowledge is in knowing, to observe heaven without stepping outside." A skilled courtier strives for broad knowledge rather than to be an expert at one thing. This allows him to maintain the attention of the fickle court, and to intimidate foes with his broad knowledge. Knowing the names of others is vital, for others always appreciate when their names are known, and forgetting a name is an effective insult.

"To succeed, a general must be unfathomable." This principle applies to the court as well, where a truly effective courtier will often act for no purpose other than to cause a stir. This distracts his enemies, causing them to wonder about his purpose while his true objectives are left unprotected.



learning their opinions toward his Clan and its enemies, learning which of them pose a threat and how they can be countered. A wise courtier brings many gifts to court and arranges meetings with potential allies as soon as possible. Just as in a duel, the first to strike wins, while the one who hesitates or flinches is defeated.

"The superior general attacks his enemy's alliances." A skilled courtier will always work to head off his enemies' plans for alliances, making better offers even if his own Clan has no direct interest. If that is not possible, he should spread rumors about his enemy to discourage others from allying with him. Servants and peasants are especially effective for spreading rumors that cannot be traced, which will eventually find their way to other samurai.

"Victory can be seen, but never forced." A good courtier is cautious even on the brink of victory, and prepares letters and contingency plans for every eventuality.

"The competent general attacks an enemy's army." Confronting an opponent in open court is an unpleasant duty, but sometimes a necessary one. If an enemy starts an argument, a skilled courtier will only seek to end it, since those who bicker are seen as fools.

"A desperate general besieges an enemy's city." A courtier should always stage confrontations on his own terms, not the enemy's. If that is not possible, he should seek a meeting on neutral ground. Only as a last resort should he meet an opponent on ground he controls.

"If your army is larger, fight. If it is smaller, keep your distance until opportunity strikes. If your army is much smaller, flee and survive." A courtier should never be afraid to use an obvious advantage – if the enemy has a hidden trick, it is better to discover it while in a position of strength. In an uncertain situation, however, it is better to wait while spies and informants root out better information. When the enemy holds the advantage, a good courtier avoids meeting him at all costs, stalling in any way possible, even feigning illness.

"A good general chooses the right officers and lets the momentum of the army do its work." Skilled courtiers do not try to do everything themselves, but instead delegate to capable underlings, including shugenja to assist them in the ways of the spirits, and ronin who can work as capable spies. It is also wise to have a loyal but incapable subordinate who can be sacrificed should things go badly.



"Victory is never repetitious." The enemy cannot be expected to fall for the same trick twice, and a skilled courtier never relies on repetitive tactics. Further, a lack of creativity can quickly and permanently lose the favor and attention of the court, as a lack of wit makes anyone look foolish and uninteresting.

"What kills the enemy is anger." Showing undue emotion is shameful and weak, so a skilled courtier will learn what upsets his enemy and use that against him. Driving a foe into a public rage will destroy his reputation, and his allies will soon look elsewhere for new friends.

"Those who render their enemy helpless without combat are triumphant." Madoko says this is Sun Tao's greatest lesson, and claims it is the ultimate reason for the courts themselves to exist.

The Courts of the Crane

Samurai are the warrior caste of Rokugan. The Crane, however, truly understand that war is not just the meeting of armies on the field of battle. They vastly prefer to meet their enemies and rivals on ground where they hold a definite edge: the courts. This is only to be expected, since they are the Clan which defines the protocols of court. Because of this, the Crane hold a variety of courts in different strongholds, each designed to deal with specific issues that may concern the Clan. There are courts specialized in matters of trade, in military disputes, even in marriage arrangements. The most elite courts, such as Kyuden Doji, handle the overall political dealings of the Clan, and only the most prestigious guests are invited to them. Regardless of whether an individual Crane court is modest or large, every samurai from another Clan who visits one knows he is stepping onto a battlefield every bit as dangerous as any he has ever faced.

Aketsu

Located in central Crane lands, Aketsu is a major center of Crane commerce, dealing equally in both land- and sea-based trade, and merchant caravans and trade ko-

bunes shuttle in and out of the city constantly. Its prosperity owes much to its location, for it sits on an open plain and near a stretch of straight coastline, offering pirates and bandits few places to hide or ambush merchants. In addition, a nearby ronin settlement supplies assistance on the rare occasions that the city comes under any kind of threat.

The central focus of the city is the enormous market known as the Golden Turtle Trading Grounds. Goods destined for all across the Crane lands, and indeed the Empire, start their journeys here, and much of the Crane trade with the Mantis Clan runs through here as well. Visiting merchants are a constant part of life throughout the spring, summer, and fall. Only in winter, when ice and snow slow the pace of travel to a crawl, does Aketsu calm down. The Kakita take pride in keeping this city free of smuggling and illegal trade, even to the point of forbidding merchants from bringing mercenaries within the Golden Turtle grounds.

Because of Aketsu's significance in trade, other Clans often send representatives to the small local court, negotiating to ensure favorable trade conditions. Consequently, at any given time there may be samurai from all over the Empire visiting the court. This is exactly what the governor, Kakita Kyruko, wants.

Kyruko is one of the great beauties of her generation, to the point that she was offered to Toturi Naseru as a bride. This gave her unsurpassed access to the elite levels of Rokugani society, exactly as her superiors in the Kolat planned. Her ability to infiltrate the highest circles of society and ferret out the secrets that were hidden there proved her worth to the organization, and Master Cloud Isawa Korekado nominated her for the position of Master Silk. Soon after, the Kolat arranged for her to be named governor of the Kisue province, where she could spread her agents throughout the Empire. Today, her agents fan out from Aketsu with trade delegations and merchant caravans, traveling the width and breadth of Rokugan. Kyruko is also one of two people in the Empire who truly knows the final wishes of Toturi III regarding his successor. What she ultimately plans on doing with this information has yet to be seen.

Benten Seido

High atop a cliff in the spur of the Seiketsu Mountains that divides northern Crane lands from the southern provinces rests the Empire's largest shrine to the For-

tune of Romantic Love, Benten. Stories associated with this shrine tell of an ancient Crane Clan Champion who brought his daughter here, demanding she choose between her lover and her life, only to see her life saved by divine intervention. Whether or not these tales are true, this shrine still serves an important function for the Crane. Many view Benten as the patron fortune of the Crane Clan, and those traveling between the Crane provinces often stop here to pray and seek the Fortune's favor. Courtiers make a special point of doing so, for they recognize the importance of romance to their activities in the Empire's courts. Those being sent to serve in the less prestigious southern territories pray for success, redemption, and an eventual return to the north. Those traveling north to serve in the Clan's most prominent courts give thanks for their success and pray for further good fortune. It is considered poor form to treat anyone you meet on the path to the shrine badly, as fate might soon dictate that you must travel in the opposite direction yourself.

The path to Benten Seido winds through several narrow mountain passes, and is often strewn with rubble and other debris from the ragged cliffs overhead. Many petitioners stop to clear the path for other pilgrims, in this way making their own offerings of labor to the Fortune. Unbeknownst to them, the monks who keep the shrine often spend entire nights replacing the rocks and other obstructions so that the next day's travelers may have the same opportunity. They believe the road to true love is a difficult and treacherous path to traverse, especially in Rokugan, where love so often conflicts with duty. The road to the shrine to the Fortune of True Love should reflect these difficulties for all pilgrims to experience. Those who do stop and take time to work through the difficult passes are often blessed by the Fortune, and those who help their fellow man to find their way are doubly so.

Kyuden Doji

Kyuden Doji is truly the crown jewel of the Crane Clan's court system. Everything about the palace speaks of beauty and elegance, and it is arguably the most beautiful place in all of Rokugan. It stands atop a high cliff, overlooking the Heart of Yakamo, still known as the Sea of Amaterasu to many who live there. The palace is more like a city than a castle, with a multitudes of shrines, tea and sake houses, theaters, marketplaces,

Love in Rokugan

While the concept of love is often tragic in western literature, it is also usually depicted as uplifting. Not so in Rokugan. Under the code of Bushido, passionate love should have no place in a samurai's heart; there is only room for complete, unquestioning devotion to one's Clan and daimyo. Any other emotions conflict with one's devotion, clouding loyalty and violating Chugo (Duty).

Only very rarely does a love story end happily for samurai; tragedy is the order of the day, and lovers often end up committing mutual suicide in the hope of being united more happily in their next life. Thus, while the Rokugani recognize and respect the power of love, and enjoy dramatic tales and poems of great lovers through history, passionate love is often frowned upon in practice. This is particularly true of rigidly traditional Clans such as the Crane or Lion, who tend to regard love as an emotion for "lower people" such as courtesans and geisha.

However, there is a peculiar double-standard to Rokugani attitudes toward love. While a blatant public declaration of love is considered bad form and a source of shame, subtly revealing the identity of one's love through a public performance such as a poem or a dance is considered a glorious coup. Similarly, lovers who successfully overcome the odds or manage to spend their lives together happily are often seen as heroic and honorable, while those who fail or commit suicide are not only seen as tragic failures but are sometimes even vilified for their deeds.

and other attractions. Between the stunning vistas and the multitude of amenities available, Kyuden Doji is one of the most sought-after locations in the Empire, which is exactly how the Crane like it.

The castle's history is a long one, and not without its tragedies. During the Clan War, the city and palace were burned to the ground by the forces of the False Hoturi. However, the Doji family turned this loss into an opportunity by rebuilding the palace with a more focused, unified design than its previous version, which had been somewhat sprawling and disorganized. As a

result, the modern Kyuden Doji is not only one of the most beautiful castles in the Empire but also one of the most architecturally consistent. Since its completion it has been universally hailed as even more glorious than its predecessor.

It is often said that beauty attracts beauty. The court of Kyuden Doji is a prime example of this. Only the most fashionable, powerful, and elegant samurai in the Empire stride through its elaborate halls. Just to walk among these individuals brings glory to a samurai's family. To have them actually speak your name can either boost or destroy a reputation. Much of the strength of the Crane political machine comes from this carefully-cultivated exclusivity. Many samurai are willing to owe a favor, or several favors, to the Crane in order to gain access to these halls of power, and this helps ensure that the Crane have no shortage of political resources to call upon in difficult times. Conversely, ranking samurai from other Clans who don't play by the rules set forth by the Crane can often find themselves excluded from Kyuden Doji, excluded from one of the most prestigious courts in all of Rokugan, a severe blow to their reputation.

Because Kyuden Doji is seen as the Empire's most elite and desirable court assignment, making a good impression there is vital. Samurai who are not completely secure in their position in the Empire should tread lightly when in the true seat of Crane power. Even something as simple as fashion can be a powerful weapon in this court. Crane tailors are kept busy by visiting samurai wishing to gain attention and prestige by keeping abreast of fashion trends. This provides a subtle but potent means of control for the court, as the Crane can manipulate their guests simply by having their daimyo start a new fashion trend. It also helps the local economy, as koku flow to the silk works and the talented seamstresses who maintain shops near the palace.

In keeping with the true customs of Rokugani politics, the Crane do most of their negotiations outside of the main court chambers, especially in the glorious gardens of Kyuden Doji. The so-called "Fantastic Gardens" are one of the greatest beauties of the palace, and offer a perfect location for quiet, unobtrusive conversations and secluded meetings. Originally, these were merely Lady Doji's private gardens, but since that time they have grown enormously, and today are the size of a small village. Story gardens, sand gardens, rock gardens,

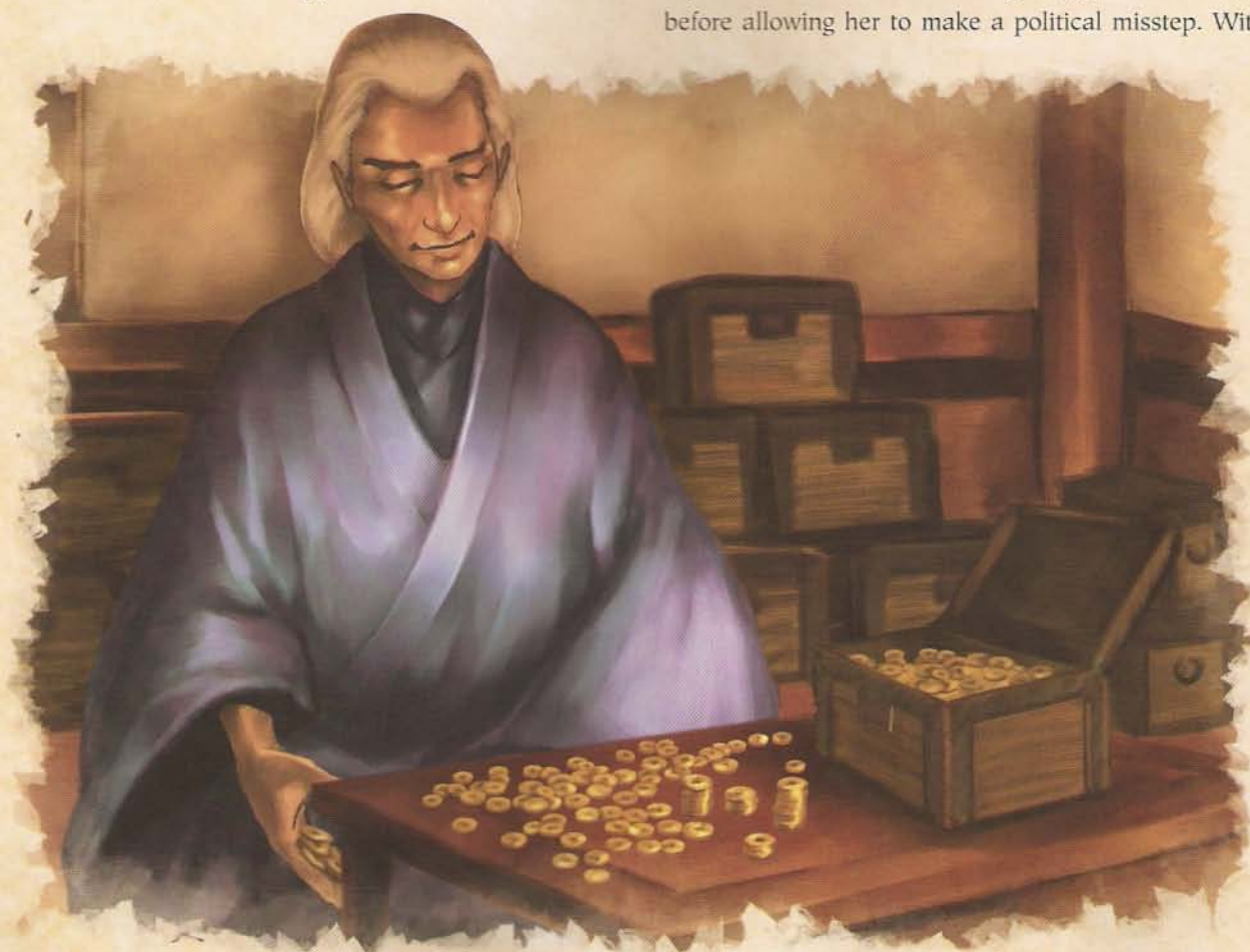


and every other sort of Rokugani garden are combined together in perfect harmony, supplemented by shrines, koi pools, and streams of pure water from the nearby Seikitsu Mountains. In recent decades the Crane have also enhanced the enjoyment of the Fantastic Gardens by adding a careful selection of sake houses, theaters, geisha houses, and other places of legitimate entertainment, all carefully designed and arranged to harmonize with the beauty of the surrounding gardens. It should come as no surprise that there are always small groups of samurai strolling through the Fantastic Gardens or pausing to enjoy its vistas.

The current master of Kyuden Doji is none other than the Crane Clan Champion, Doji Domotai. Because of her militant upbringing amongst the Matsu, many Crane have doubts about her political effectiveness, although they are of course careful to keep such thoughts to themselves. These doubts were further inflamed by the inflexibility she showed toward Hida Kuon at the start of the Crane-Crab war. However, she has begun to dispel such worries with her performance at her first Winter Court, when she appeared in the courts wear-

ing a kimono in a style that was popular during the reign of Hantei X. Due to the complexity of the style, and the Crane foreknowledge of her plans, they were able to tie up most of the available tailors, placing all others attending the court at a distinct disadvantage. The exchange of favors to the Crane for access to these craftsmen won the Clan a subtle but significant political victory, and showed the young Champion is beginning to learn how to wield the traditional weapons of her Clan.

A strong comfort to the Crane who still harbor doubts about their Champion is the presence of her advisors, who include one of the most renowned courtiers in the Empire. Doji Nagori has served the Crane in the Imperial Court for several years, and now functions as the Chancellor of Kyuden Doji. His influence on its court is considerable. As the former advisor to Yasuki Hachi, and party to the rebuilding of the Imperial courts with Ide Tadaji and Miya Shoin, his reputation alone makes others think twice before disrupting the harmony of Kyuden Doji. He watches over his cousin Domotai like a protective uncle, and would gladly give his own life before allowing her to make a political misstep. With



his recent marriage to the promising young courtier Doji Jorihime, herself a rising star in the Crane political atmosphere, he has ensured the future of the Crane will be well-protected for a long time to come.

Drifting like a shadow through Doji Domotai's court is one of her most secret and possibly potent weapons: Daidoji Uji, the dark shadow who emerged through a remote spirit gate from a world where Fu Leng was victorious at the Second Day of Thunder. Uji stalks through the shadows of Kyuden Doji under the false name of Daidoji Fumisato. He serves Domotai as a secret enforcer, and offers her an alternate point of view when her Matsu-influenced honor restricts her thinking too much. Recently he proved his devotion to the Champion by helping to destroy Shiro Giji, removing the stain to the Crane's honor that the Harriers had become. Indeed, as part of this action he was forced to kill Daidoji Hakumei, who had been one of his most favored students in his own twisted past. With such an assortment of loyal advisors, Domotai should ultimately have little difficulty maintaining her Clan's dominance in the courts.

Masume Mura

"The finest marriage arrangers of the Crane make their home here. Seek your future here, or seal your fate."

— Kakita Munemori

The town of Musume Mura sits a only short distance down the coast from Kyuden Doji, and would probably be completely overshadowed if not for its famous history and the presence of so many equally famous Nakodo (matchmakers). The village itself is outwardly unremarkable, a prosperous fishing settlement. The surrounding hills, however, contain lush samurai estates, fine examples of hospitality and comfort, where the Nakodo reside. Meanwhile, the village docks are surrounded numerous sake shops and geisha houses, enough to make the most jaded resident of Toshi Aitate or Zakyō Toshi feel at home. Smugglers, pirates and other disreputable types often make landfall here, for Masume Mura's status as a town of matchmakers has unfortunately also given it a false reputation as a town where unprotected young women wander the streets. These establishments cater to these fantasies for the dregs of Rokugani society. Crane Clan magistrates often try to root out this blight on an otherwise idyllic settle-

ment, but it seems that once corruption takes hold, it is difficult to dislodge.

The original fame of Masume Mura, and the reason why it became such a center for matchmakers, lies just off the coast on the island of Michi ni Mayotta Musume (Lost Daughter Inlet). It is here that the first Hantei met his bride, after a long search of the Empire for the perfect woman. During the Hantei Dynasty, each Emperor's bride-to-be would spend a night alone on the island before the wedding, communing with the spirits of the first Hantei and his wife. This custom fell out of practice with the Toturi Dynasty, but another rose to take its place. The peasants who live nearby claim that if an expecting mother spends a night alone in prayer on the island, her first child will be born a boy.

While there is not truly a court in Masume Mura, the marriage arrangers of this settlement are a surprisingly effective political asset to the Crane Clan, and a perfect example of the "soft power" which the Crane exercise throughout the courts of Rokugan. When honorable parents wish to find an acceptable match for their children, they often make the journey to this humble settlement deep in the Crane lands. The matchmakers of Masume Mura are known to be skilled, careful, and compassionate, in contrast to their often gruff and meddling counterparts elsewhere. In fact, parents have been known to bring infants to Masume Mura in order to give the Nakodo the maximum amount of time to find a suitable match. The arrangers do their best to find mutually beneficial matches for each of their charges, and few are dissatisfied with their work.

Aside from the obvious favors and wealth heaped upon the Nakodo, they provide another vital service for their Clan. This village contains records of the lineage of all the most important samurai in Rokugan. Indeed, in such matters of breeding the records of the matchmakers are unrivaled, and unlike the Ikoma histories, these documents sometimes take account of the future as well. The Nakodo often gather to plan the future of the Empire, revising and developing their plans as children are born to premiere families. While they maintain a reputation as sincere and well-meaning intermediaries, it would be naïve to believe they do not incorporate the future prosperity of the Crane into their plans. As such, Masume Mura will continue to play a major roll in the future of Rokugan.

How Hantei Met His Bride

After seeing the wedded bliss of Kakita and his sister Doji, Hantei decided he should find a bride to accompany him in life and bear him an heir. He traveled the lands of each of the nascent Clans, searching for the perfect woman to be the first Empress. When he failed to find his match anywhere, he turned to his sister Doji and the maidens of the Crane. Doji's followers searched far and wide to find a suitable match for the Emperor. In the village of Ichito, just south of Kyuden Doji, these samurai found only fisherwomen hardened by years of toilsome labor out in the elements. Seeing no prospects, they passed by the village.

Little did they know that one fisherman in that village had a daughter who was a true beauty of her generation. Doji Mioko had a voice so pure and beautiful that the fish in the ocean would rise to the surface to listen to her – which made fishing very easy for her father. Afraid of losing his livelihood, he took his daughter to an island off the coast to hide until the Emperor's servants had left the area.

The women brought to court by Kakita and Doji were truly the best the Crane could offer. Hantei was forced to admit there was little he could find lacking in their honor, beauty, skills, or honor. But much like the maidens from the other Clans, none seemed to make his heart beat faster, as his sister had admitted Kakita did for her.

A gloomy Hantei decided to take some sport with his hunting falcons to raise his spirits. While chasing a stray bird, he found himself on the coast. As the sea breeze blew in, it faintly carried a hauntingly sad and beautiful tune with it. When he told Kakita of this, the husband of Doji took him to the village, seeking a ferry to the island from where the song seemed to be coming.

The only fisherman not out to sea was Mioko's father. He took Hantei and Kakita on a cruise around the island. When he learned the purpose of their trip, the clever fisherman regaled them with tales of the wind blowing through rocks and coral. He claimed it could often sound like a maiden singing for her lover. Satisfied and slightly disappointed, Hantei returned to the mainland to meet the next group of Crane maidens.

After the samurai had left, the fisherman returned to the island to speak to his daughter and bring her food. He found her hiding in a cave as he had instructed her. When she claimed to have seen him at sea and asked who the man with him had been, he replied it was merely a beggar. Then he praised her for her obedience and returned to the mainland.

The fisherman did not know that Mioko had seen Hantei and instantly fallen deeply in love with the radiant young Emperor. She wrote a haiku about the man she had seen on a ribbon, and tied it to the leg of a bird she had befriended. With a prayer to Amaterasu, she released the dove to carry her feelings away from the island. The dove flew true and came to land in the bushes outside of Hantei's rooms. The ribbon tangled in the branches, and the bird remained until it was rescued by the young Kami. After reading the poem, Hantei summoned Kakita. He proclaimed the author of the poem the only woman he would marry, and bid his champion to find her. Crane samurai once again set out to scour their lands for the soul who wrote the haiku, but no one could tell them who had written the poem on the ribbon.

When the fisherman told his daughter of the Emperor's search, Mioko burst into tears. The Emperor had stolen her words and taken them as his own. Now she would never have her handsome beggar. The quick thinking fisherman asked for the words to the poem, telling his daughter that he would teach them to another village girl. Once the Emperor had left, he promised, he would help her to find her beggar.

The fisherman brought a village girl to the Emperor's palace, bearing his daughter's words. The Crane rejoiced at having provided a bride for the Emperor, but Hantei sensed that something was amiss. He asked the girl for more of her poetry, but found it lacking in prose and emotion. The poor girl broke down and told Hantei how the fisherman had come to her with the scheme to fool the Emperor.

The next day Hantei visited the fisherman and asked to hear the music from the island coral once more, before he and his bride-to-be left for the

capitol. The fisherman grudgingly rowed the young Kami out to the island. When Mioko saw her father return with her "beggar," she rushed out to meet the man her father had promised to find for her. When Hantei saw Mioko, he dropped to his knees and declared his love for her, and when she accepted his love and returned it, Hantei wept tears that turned to pure jade as they fell upon the sand. He collected the tears and gave them to Kakita in exchange for the Crane maiden's hand in marriage. As for the father, in punishment for his deception he was exiled from the mainland of Rokugan. He lived the rest of his life on the island, with only the wind in the coral for companionship.

Mura Sabishii Toshi

Another major trade hub, and a vital city for Crane commercial relations with the Crab and Mantis Clans. Lonely Shore City's location makes it militarily quite secure, since only a Mantis fleet or an army marching through the entire southern Crane territory could threaten it – both unlikely eventualities. Indeed, both the Mantis and the Crab have heavy trade interests in the city themselves, making them unlikely to try to damage it. Even with the recent war between Crane and Crab, Mura Sabishii Toshi remains secure, lying well north of the border zone which the Crab have occupied. The inhabitants of the city, especially the large number of new-made Crane Yasuki who settled there during the time of Yasuki Hachi, regard the war with unease but no real alarm.

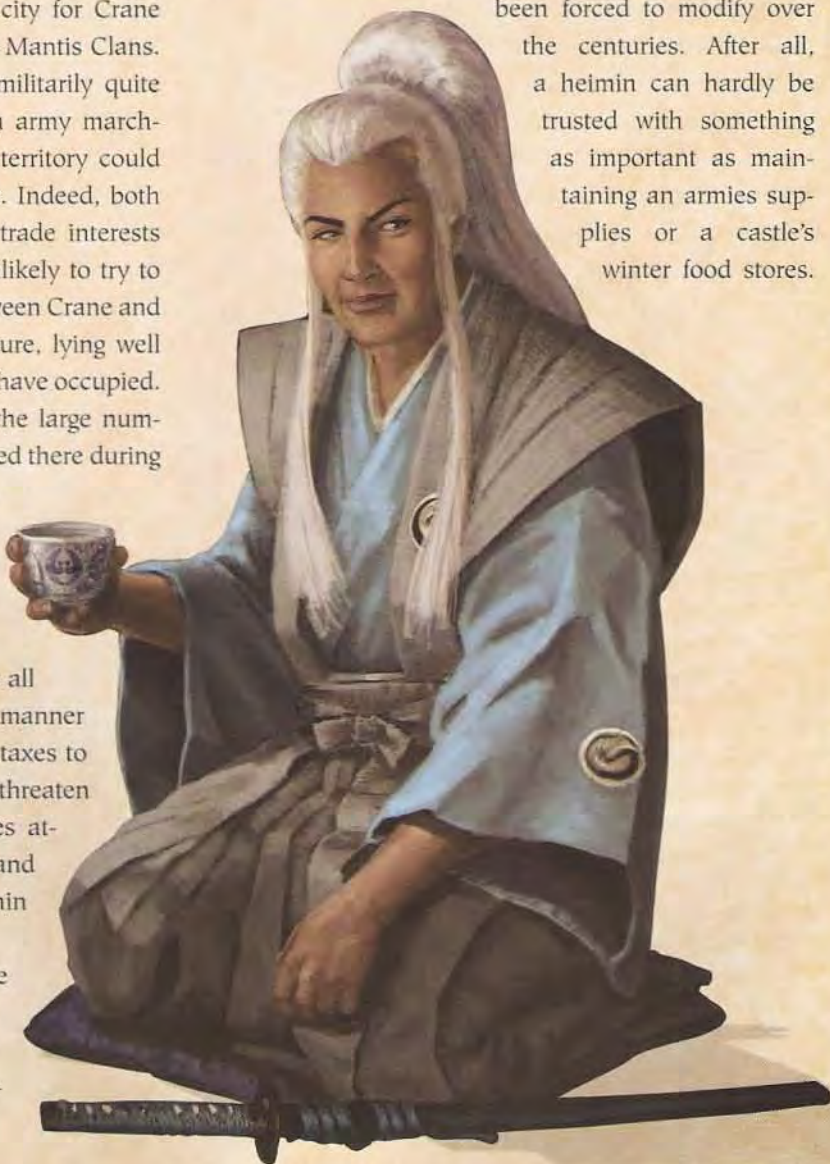
Like Aketsu, Mura Sabishii Toshi's small court is devoted largely to matters of trade. Mantis, Daidoji, and Yasuki samurai, many of them merchants in all but name, gather there to negotiate all manner of commercial matters, from tariffs and taxes to dealing with the pirates who sometimes threaten nearby waters. Lion samurai sometimes attend this court as well, for both the Lion and the Mantis have significant holdings within the city.

The town's true political significance comes from its status as the home of the Daidoji Trading Council. The Council's Trading House is an enormous struc-

ture that connects several warehouses to a huge central chamber where the Trading Council gathers to conduct its business. Despite the vast wealth they control, the members of the Council are careful to decorate their headquarters in a modest and tasteful manner, lest open displays of wealth inspire anger and envy in their business partners. The samurai who form the council are, in fact, extraordinarily wealthy, easily rivaling the richest members of the Yasuki and Yoritomo Families, and their influence extends through all of the Empire's trade networks and marketplaces.

The Daidoji Trading Council

The prevailing view of Rokugani society is that matters of trade and money should be left to heimin, specifically to the lowest ranks of heimin known as merchants. However, this is a view which the samurai caste has been forced to modify over the centuries. After all, a heimin can hardly be trusted with something as important as maintaining an army's supplies or a castle's winter food stores.



In order to be able to oversee such matters while still technically keeping their hands clean, samurai of Rokugan developed the concept of merchant patronage, in which a powerful noble provides protection and supervision to the commoner merchants under his control. Although this compromise is regarded with disdain by some in the Empire, it has proven quite effective, and most Clans accept it as a necessary evil.

The Daidoji family has assumed this role for the Crane Clan, just as it has taken on other unsavory and dishonorable, but necessary, tasks for the good of the Clan. To this end, most of the Daidoji merchant patrons have pooled and coordinated their efforts to form the Daidoji Trading Council, a joint network designed to optimize the Clan's leverage in commercial negotiations. Each member of the Council has several merchants, anywhere from four to a dozen, under his or her control. The Council excels in its work, and its wealth and power has grown to the point where it can actually cause significant economic fluctuations and inflict serious damage on enemies of the Crane Clan.

Members of the Trading Council often begin their training alongside the Doji Courtiers, learning the social and political skills they need to perform their duties. They spend much of their early careers fostering ties among their merchant vassals and developing networks

of allies and contacts. Once they have established themselves, they frequently go on to train at one of the major Crane Schools to develop a wider variety of skills.

The admission of many Yasuki into the Crane Clan caused considerable unease among the members of the Trading Council. Many of them found it difficult to let go of centuries of commercial rivalry with the Yasuki, and others still saw them as potential rivals even after they joined the Clan. It would probably not be inaccurate to say that the majority of the Council would be happy to see the Yasuki return to the Crab fold, if for no other reason than it would remove a serious complication from their lives.

Shiro Daidoji

In stark contrast to the courts of Kyuden Doji, the Daidoji daimyo holds his court in a much more spartan and less welcoming environment. Originally the private residence of Doji Hayaku, the founder of the Daidoji family, Shiro Daidoji has always been a fortress first and a palace second. It is a traditional fortified estate, with none of the luxury and glamour found in the castles of the Doji and Kakita. While it has been besieged numerous times, and fallen to the Clan's enemies more than once (most recently during the Clan War), each time the Crane have rebuilt it to be stronger than before. The



castle is the symbol of the family's steadfast determination to defend the Crane Clan to the last, and it is said that as long as a single brink of Shiro Daidoji stands, the family cannot truly be defeated.

The one true courtly amenity which Shiro Daidoji offers to its visitors comes in the form of a library. The Daidoji Library is, in fact, one of the greatest collections of military thought in the empire. It was founded centuries ago for the express purpose of collecting information on military thought throughout the Empire, and the Doji and Kakita have sometimes speculated that the scrolls and tomes on its shelves are as likely to be stolen as they are to be acquired legitimately. The library includes excerpts from some of the Empire's most famous works, such as Akodo's *Leadership* and Bayushi Tansen's *Lies*, copied directly from the originals. A complete copy of Sun Tao's works – allegedly, one originally bound for Lion lands, which the Daidoji claim to have recovered from a mysterious stone shrine in a farmer's field – places the library on an equal footing with the legendary strategy libraries of the Akodo family.

Some of the books in this library are controversial, and might even be considered treasonous to other Clans. There are several tomes here outlining the strategies, fighting styles, and weapons of gaijin peoples. Acquired mainly from the Unicorn and Mantis, these books discuss the strange folk they have encountered in their foreign travels, and they are supplemented by accounts of the Battle of the White Stag. There are also several scrolls by the original Daidoji Uji, discussing how these foreign tactics and methods could be integrated into samurai tactics... and how they could be countered, should the Empire ever be again threatened by gaijin invasion. This collection of scrolls is watched over by a strange gaijin double-edged sword, hanging on display overhead. Although the Daidoji allow guests to peruse their famous library, they are careful to keep this portion of their collection private, lest it be misunderstood or misused by those hostile to the Crane.

Visitors to Shiro Daidoji's court are typically emissaries from Clans which are considered potential military threats. The sight of thousands of Daidoji bushi training in the fields around the castle is an imposing one, comparable to watching the Imperial Legions on maneuvers. It is an image the Crane wish their enemies to carry with

them, and they customarily place their guests in rooms with windows facing the training fields. Of course, these troops are often used as much to deceive as to impress, creating an impression of overwhelming strength or reduced weakness, as the current political situation demands. Enemies who buy into these deceptions are in for an unpleasant surprise on the battlefield.

The current master of Shiro Daidoji is the family daimyo, Daidoji Kikaze, a man who understands the need for such deceptions. Kikaze was trained as a Harrier, and he knows that some secrets must be protected. He sees the role of Shiro Daidoji's court as one of showing visitors what they need to see, ensuring they cannot discover the true strength of his family. Since the recent disbanding of the Harriers by Doji Domatai, Kikaze has decided that tricks such as this are even more important to the continued welfare of his family – with no Harrier tactics to fall back on, the Daidoji must be able show their enemies a strength they do not always possess. To further project the image of readiness and strength, he deliberately does not hide his warrior's nature in the courts, often speaking in a blunt and straightforward manner. When hosting court in Shiro Daidoji, he sometimes appears in full armor, as if he has just returned from the training fields himself. While this can make him seem uncouth and draw unfortunate comparisons to the Hida, it also reminds the Crane's enemies of the dangerous similarities between the Daidoji and the Crab.

The Iron Crane Dojo

Shiro Daidoji is home to the Iron Crane Dojo, the main training ground for the Daidoji yojimbo and their supplementary military units, such as the Heavy Regulars and the Iron Warriors. It is the oldest dojo in the Daidoji lands, and since the destruction of Kosaten Shiro in the War of Silk and Steel, it is also the family's largest and most important dojo. Students of the Iron Crane Dojo are known for being pragmatic and hard-headed in their mindset, but also for employing an older, more traditional fighting style.

Shinden Asahina

Shinden Asahina is one of the most peaceful locations in the Empire. Lying on the eastern edge of the Fields of the Morning Sun, within sight of the Yasuki lands, the Temple of the Rising Sun is a place of peace and contemplation, and one of the foremost centers for theological studies in all of Rokugan. The temple complex is quite large, for many buildings have been added over the years, each placed to add to the overall beauty of the temple's design. The central temple, constructed of ancient dark stone, is engraved with countless historical scenes and prayers dedicated to peace. It is said that one cannot become a true master of the temple without reading and studying all of them, but this is a formidable task, for rumors claim sections of the temple have become awakened from the presence of so many shugenja for so long. The walls and paths of Shinden Asahina can change, and will only teach a shugenja who learns how to properly ask his questions – a task which can take a lifetime.

Shinden Asahina supposedly houses the treasures that the family has accumulated over the course of the Empire's history, but there are no locked doors in this place, no hidden vaults or warded dungeons. Instead, the powerful secrets contained within the Temple of the Morning Sun are hidden behind open doors and warm smiles. Supposedly, in time of need the halls will guide one to rooms which do not exist on the temple's floor plans. It may be that the dreaded Anvil of Despair rests in such a hidden space, singing its siren song to any of the Asahina who harbor the same secret thirst for power as their shameful ancestor Asahina (Daigotsu) Yajinden.

Throughout the temples, pacifistic Asahina can be found in quiet meditation, rigorous prayer, or calm debate concerning the finer points of theology and the Tao. It is in this place of peace that the family daimyo, Asahina Keitaro, holds his court. While the cultivated beauty of Kyuden Doji sets the standard for the empire, and Shiro Daidoji is designed to mislead and put its visitors on guard, the simple calming spirit of Shinden Asahina's courts puts its visitors completely at ease. A calm mind and peaceful soul are often much more receptive to the quiet words of the Crane, and this has not gone unnoticed by the Clan. Troubled samurai often seek out Asahina hospitality to find their center

before resuming their duties. The shugenja help these men heal their spiritual wounds, and the Crane gain new allies and favors from these visitors. Because of this, Shinden Asahina is one of the most welcoming locations in Crane lands. Only those who would bring violence into the temple are barred, and then only if the peaceful priests are unable to persuade the violator into another course of action.

Asahina Keitaro has a personal stake in maintaining the serenity of his home. As a young man some years ago he came to know the weight carried by a burdened soul when his true love was killed at the Test of the Emerald Champion. He served with the Jade Magistrates for a time to attempt to gain a measure of revenge for his loss, but he found that he gained no respite from his pain no matter how many Shadowlands creatures and Bloodspeaker cultists he sent screaming to Jigoku. His predecessor as daimyo, Asahina Sekawa, took note of his vassal's distress and assigned him to oversee the operations of Shinden Asahina. The tranquility of his surroundings reminded Keitaro of his family's place in the Empire, allowing him to set aside his anger and become a brilliant administrator. When Asahina Sekawa chose to leave Rokugan to protect the Legacy of Shinsei, there was no one better suited to take over the family. Keitaro maintains the Asahina family peace not only for the sake of his own soul, but for all those who follow the same path. Under his leadership, Kyuden Asahina remains a beacon of peace and tranquility, a court which reminds Rokugan that a samurai is not only a warrior, but also a scholar and pious believer in the celestial order. That it is also a court which benefits the needs of the Crane Clan is only a bonus.

Bunya Sano Asahina

The Fields of the Morning Sun, located close by Shinden Asahina, are a sacred place where the most honorable samurai refuse to fight. Although the Fields are best known for the great shrine of Jurojin, Fortune of Longevity, which resides there, the Asahina find additional uses for this place. When samurai come to Shinden Asahina in search of peace and healing, they are encouraged to visit the nearby fields, to meditate on the peaceful surroundings and embrace their tranquility and harmony.

Shiro Kyotei

The ancestral home of the Tsume vassal family sits in the fertile Kintani Valley, close to the territory of both the Lion and the Phoenix, and geographically isolated from the rest of Crane territory. Home to the famous Tsume Pikemen dojo, this castle has become an important economic center for the Crane, as the isolated Tsume family has labored to make their holding into a major trade center and a self-sufficient holding. The large town and bustling markets of the Kintani Valley provide the Crane with a source of great wealth, especially useful in such a strategic location. But the castle, a small but formidable stronghold, looms above the town ominously, a continual reminder of their isolated location... and of the principle that Lions have long memories.

Tsume Akemetsu, the current daimyo, knows just how precarious his family's position truly is. The Lion still remember the loss of this castle in the late 10th century, at the hands of the ambitious daimyo Tsume Retsu. It was his bloody victory, in which the Lion vassal family of the Damasu was wiped out, which led to the Tsume gaining their family name, and there are many in the Lion ranks who have still not forgotten. Since Shiro

Kyotei became a Crane stronghold its lords have traditionally avoided inviting Lion samurai to visit more than absolutely necessary, but with the recent friendship between the Lion and Crane, and the growth of Shiro Kyotei as a center of both trade and politics, this has had to change. In fact, Shiro Kyotei has become an important court for maintaining the Lion-Crane alliance, much to the quiet dismay of the Tsume.

The modest court at Shiro Kyotei is primarily dedicated to Lion-Crane diplomatic, military, and commercial relations, although Phoenix are also invited there to discuss matters of trade and border security. While the general air in the castle is one of sincere hospitality, the truly observant can pick up a subtle undertone of paranoia whenever there are a large number of Lion samurai present. Akemetsu has aged noticeably since taking control of his family. He believes the current peace between Lion and Crane is ephemeral at best, and he knows that if a Lion attack ever comes, his holding is several days' march from any help, and the odds of survival are low. Each day he prays to the Fortunes and ancestors that his Doji patrons can keep the Lion armies from his gates for another day.



Shiro Sano Kakita

While Kyuden Doji is the home of the Crane Clan's political power, Shiro Daidoji is the Clan's strength, and Shinden Asahina is their calm heart, it is Shiro Sano Kakita where the true soul of the Crane Clan is best shown. The artisans and duelists here strive to achieve perfection in their respective arts, following the path laid down by Kakita himself, for it is within these walls that he perfected the art of iaijutsu. Many tend to forget that Kakita was not just a near-peerless swordsman, but also a quiet and talented artist. Those samurai who follow him believe that to not attempt to raise his arts to new levels is to deny the memory and legacy of their founder. The way of the sword may not call to all of his children, but those who don't carry katana venerate their founder in other fashions, proving their worth to the Clan by producing peerless works of art. Beyond their intrinsic value, these artistic creations are also potent gifts, reinforcing the Crane Clan's diplomacy.

Shiro Sano Kakita is an extremely beautiful castle, unsurprising given that it stands above the Clan's famed Artisan Academy and Dueling Academy. Covered gardens and walkways directly connect the castle to the schools, creating the appearance of two smaller schools within the main stronghold. Nearby is the temple of Seido Kakita, where the Crane pay reverence to the family's founder. It is one of the most opulent temples in the Empire, and seldom lacks for visitors. The monks who tend it are dedicated to the memory of Kakita and his first children, the twins who shared the soul of Thunder. Smaller shrines in the temple complex venerate later heroes of the Kakita family, including Kakita Yoshi, Chancellor during the time of the Clan War, and Kakita Toshiken, who served as Emerald Champion to Emperor Toturi I.

Shiro Sano Kakita, like many other Kakita holdings, was ravaged and devastated during the Clan War. After the conflict, the Kakita seized this opportunity to rebuild the castle completely. This was a task they undertook with especial fervor because the castle had been cursed centuries earlier by one of the legendary Grand Masters of the Elements. The gates of the castle had been slammed shut in his face by an errant gust of wind, and in anger he declared that any Crane born within the castle while the gates were shut would be unable to touch steel, lest the blades of the Crane be

turned against each other. To counter the curse, the Kakita long maintained a tradition of leaving the gates open whenever a childbirth was impending. When they rebuilt the castle, they hoped to end the curse by relocating the castle completely, but the Clan's shortage of koku immediately after the Clan War forced them to use the original foundations.

The Kakita courts can be a somewhat different experience for visitors than the other major Crane courts. Samurai travel to Shiro Sano Kakita from all across the Empire, trying to solicit to the services of the skilled Kakita artisans on behalf of their lords or themselves. Such guests spend much of their time extolling their virtues and heaping gifts and favors upon the master artists, attempting to gain their attention and approval. More than one of these hopefuls believes that immortality through art is a prize worth any amount of koku or political effort, and the Crane benefit accordingly, so long as proper decorum is maintained. Of course, with Kakita duelists prowling the halls, there is little risk of a breach of etiquette. The mere presence of such men and women reminds petitioners that their lives could be ended in less than a heartbeat, and thus Shiro Sano Kakita is known as one of the most polite and soft-spoken courts in the Empire, despite its unusual selection of visitors.

A quieter group of samurai also tends to find its way to this Crane city. These warriors hope to take a few of Kakita's teachings with them when they leave, and do their best to impress the Kakita sensei. Of course, few are ever truly admitted to the dueling academy, for as has been observed before, the prestigious nature of the Kakita Academy depends on its exclusivity. Recently, however, a greater number of Lions have been admitted to the School, in honor of the Clan's training given to Doji Domatai – although some of the more traditionalist sensei quietly grumble about this trend. On the other hand, one group which is now consistently excluded from the School is the Scorpion Clan. Since the conclusion of the recent Emerald Tournament, all Scorpion Clan students have been purged from the rolls, and no more have been considered for admission.

Although family daimyo Kakita Noritoshi is widely acknowledged as the greatest duelist of his time, he plays little role in the court of Shiro Sano Kakita. Noritoshi is a man with many burdens on his shoulders. In addition to serving as the daimyo of one of the most

prestigious Families in the Empire and as head sensei of the Dueling Academy, he is also the sworn enemy of the new Emerald Champion, Shosuro Jimen. As if this were not enough to wear down a normal man, his eldest son carries the curse of Kyuden Kakita, making him unable to touch steel without bringing disaster upon his family. It was this same son's life which was threatened by Jimen to force Noritoshi to withdraw from the Emerald Tournament. Since that event, Noritoshi has been seen within his court less frequently than any Kakita daimyo in recent history. Consequently, the court of Shiro Sano Kakita is dominated today by younger courtiers and assistants, most of them Doji-trained.

The Kakita Jester School

Within the famed Kakita Artisan Academy is a small dojo where students are instructed in one of the most peculiar arts of the Kakita: the path of the Jester. At one time, the Jesters were considered to be students of the larger Artisan Academy, but their studies were so specialized and unusual, a unique blend of acting, dance, poetry, music, and political commentary – that the School felt it best to separate them into their own small dojo. This has not proven a misguided decision, for there are few samurai suited to the life of a Jester, and the dojo is never crowded.

Jesters are a very unusual form of performance artisan, created by the Crane but occasionally seen among other Clans. They are expected to dance and strut through the courts, mocking the failings of others, pointing out failures of honor, and delivering stinging satire and public jokes about important figures. Among normal samurai such behavior would prompt duels, but the Jesters receive the sanction of their lords to say things that would otherwise never be tolerated. They are permitted to speak publicly about another person's loss of reputation, honor, or face, so long as they do so in a tone of mockery and satire. Notwithstanding their "immunity," however, most Jesters are careful to attach themselves to a specific noble in order to gain extra protection for their often-acerbic comedic performances. The current sensei of the Jester School is no exception to this rule.

NPC: KAKITA KUMIYUZU, SENSEI OF THE KAKITA JESTER SCHOOL

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 4

Awareness: 5 Willpower: 5 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 2.3 Status: 4.0 Glory: 5.7

SCHOOL/RANK: Kakita Jester 5

SKILLS: Athletics 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 8, Deceit 6, Etiquette (Conversation, Sincerity) 5, Instruction 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 3, Performance: Dance 5, Performance: Jester 10, Performance: Song 4, Storytelling (Poetry) 6, Theology 2.

ADVANTAGES: Allies (various Crane daimyo), Social Position (sensei)

DISADVANTAGES: Cruel

Kakita Kumiyuzu is a cranky, dyspeptic old man, his health beginning to fail even as his formidable skills remain unchanged. He began his career as a Jester in the courts of Doji Kuwanen. From the beginning, Kumiyuzu's tongue was exceptionally barbed, even for a Jester, and his relentless mockery brought more than one dishonorable guest to a state of spitting, incoherent rage. He was always careful, however, to maintain good relations with the lord of whichever court he attended, and in later life he cultivated personal friendships with Kakita Kaiten and later, Doji Kurohito. It was Kurohito who ultimately forced him to leave the courts and take up a post as a sensei. The Crane had recently improved their relations with the Lion, and many Lion samurai had begun to visit Kyuden Doji's courts. Kurohito feared the stiff, dignified Lion would be unable to take Kumiyuzu's barbed humor, and might simply lose their tempers and strike off his head. This would have been a diplomatic disaster, of course, and so Kurohito decided it was best for the old Jester to take up a teaching position.

Kumiyuzu remains just as acid-tongued today, as an aging and increasingly decrepit sensei, as he ever was in his prime. His criticism of young students' performances can often leave them wishing for seppuku. He seems to take a perverse pleasure in making his students as miserable as possible, apparently on the theory that their bitterness will make them better Jesters.

NPC: KAKITA TSUKAO, ARTISAN OF THE STEEL CRANE FORGE**Air:** 3 **Earth:** 2 **Fire:** 5 **Water:** 3 **Void:** 6

Awareness 5 Willpower 3

Honor: 4.3 **Status:** 2.0 **Glory:** 6.5**SCHOOL/RANK:** Kakita Artisan (Painting) 3/
Master Artificer 3***SKILLS:** Artisan: Painting 4, Calligraphy 6, Courtier 2, Craft: Armor 10, Etiquette 5, Games: Go 3, Instruction 4, Lore: Art 6, Lore: Heraldry 4, Meditation (Zanji) 6, Storytelling 2, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 3**ADVANTAGES:** Higher Purpose (create art through armor), Irreproachable**DISADVANTAGES:** Bad Health*See *Prayers & Treasures*, p. 114 for the Master Artificer Advanced School.

Kakita Tsukao has spent four decades creating art for the Crane – pottery, paintings, swords, and armor. His works are prized throughout the Empire for their perfect melding of artistic purity with practical use, and consequently the Clan has allowed him to continue working long after the normal age of retirement. He spends some of his time today in the Artisan Academy, passing on his knowledge

to younger samurai, but his heart remains in his work, and he has politely refused offers to serve as a full-time sensei of the School.

Tsukao often visits the Steel Crane Forge to work, and he is welcomed there with reverence. Unlike most of the artisans who labor there, however, his favored creations are not swords, but armor. Tsukao's armors are true works of art, their lacquer and decorations forming a harmony of color and form which draws admiration from even the Kaiu smiths. He makes only three or four suits of armor each year, and the awarding of these gifts is always a moment of excitement and prestige. Most recently, he gifted an especially magnificent suit to Doji Nagori on the occasion of his wedding. The armor, simple and elegant, was designed to complement the style of the legendary blade, supposedly Kakita's first, which Nagori bears.

Tsukao is a humble man, one who has spent his entire life in the service of art and desires nothing else. Despite his advancing age his skills remain as potent as when he was a young man. When asked the secret of his undimmed talents, he smiles and remarks simply, "In painting or in smithing, focus is what matters."



The Steel Crane Forge

An hour south of Kyuden Kakita lies a small holding where the Crane conduct a vital matter for their Clan: the forging of the legendary Kakita Blades. A single smithy is used for this sacred task, and the handful of samurai artisans who labor at it are considered holy men by the rest of the Clan. If there is one goal which petitioners to Shiro Sano Kakita seek above all others, it is to be permitted to visit this sacred forge. Only a handful of guests are ever allowed inside.

The forge is kept as clean as such a place can be, and is constantly watched over by monks and shugenja who purify the grounds and equipment. No impurity, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, can be allowed to taint the work which the Kakita perform here, and those who cannot maintain the proper sense of complete purity and focus are not allowed to remain, no matter how great their skills.

Umoeru Mura

No name in the Empire can strike fear into the heart of a Crane courtier like Umoeru Mura. "Rubble Village" is a small coal-producing village in Doji lands, and its name derives from its inability to recover from a devastating Crab attack during the Clan War. The Doji never bothered to commit serious resources to rebuilding the town, preferring to assign their wealth to restoring more important settlements like Kyuden Doji. Even today the village is in poor shape, with some buildings still lying in ruins and the poorer heimin reduced to scraping out burrows for themselves in the rubble piles from the mines. Due to strong seismic activity in the region, entire families often go missing when their home is suddenly devoured by an earthquake. The town survives, however, so long as the coal continues to flow to the Kakita smithies, and a few Mantis ships sometimes use its tiny port as a way-station on their way to larger markets.

Despite Umoeru Mura's obscurity, its name is known in the Crane courts, for this is where courtiers who have failed repeatedly are assigned to finish their days in shameful obscurity. Any courtier whose career is doing poorly, or a samurai dogged by accusations of weakness or cowardice, is likely to begin hearing the name of Rubble Village in conversations behind his back. In many cases this threat is enough to bring about a turn-

around, as the samurai strives to avoid such a terrible fate. In a few cases, however, the threat comes true. Such internal exiles live out their lives in futility, attending a tiny "court" composed almost wholly of similar failures.

The local governor, Doji Munoto, has ruled the town since the time of the Four Winds, and it was worn on him badly. When he first arrived he was shocked by the misery and open corruption he witnessed. He repeatedly sent for assistance to fix the problem, but was repeatedly denied – no-one in the senior ranks of the Crane Clan cared enough to do something about such a minor settlement. The years since have not been kind to this once-honorable man. Having slowly resigned himself to the fact that there was nothing to be done, he has instead embraced the corruption and misery of the town, raising corruption to an art form. His tiny, unhappy court is a dark mockery of Kyuden Doji. Instead of a glorious place of honor and beauty, it is a place of debasement and blackmail, where the fallen Doji practice skills similar to those they would formerly have only attributed to the Scorpion. They have so few visitors that they seldom worry about facing any consequences for their behavior.

Recently, however, a few new visitors have begun to be seen in Rubble Village. Ronin wearing a strange spider-shaped mon have appeared in the region several times, and a Scorpion named Shosuro Maru has spent considerable amounts of time in private discussions with Doji Munoto.

Notable Crane NPCs

Although there are countless Crane of talent and skill who serve their Clan in the courts, there are always a few who stand out above the rest, whether due to their skills, their future prospects, or their past successes.

ASAHINA BENIHA

Air: 4	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 4
		Intelligence: 4		Perception: 4
Honor: 3.2		Status: 1.5		Glory: 4.7

SCHOOL/RANK: Asahina Shugenja 2/Doji Courtier 1
SKILLS: Calligraphy (Clan Cipher) 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Deceit (Lying) 3, Defense 1, Etiquette (Conversation, Sincerity) 6, Games: Sadane 2, Lore: Heraldry 3, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Theology (Fortunism) 2, Spellcraft 4, Tea Ceremony 2

ADVANTAGES: Bente's Blessing, Great Potential: Courtier, Multiple Schools

Asahina Beniha grew up in the quiet halls of Shinden Asahina, studying the ways of the Kami and learning her family's philosophies of pacifism and contemplation. Although she was a capable student, able to entreat the spirits as effectively as any shugenja, she did not fit in well with the Asahina lifestyle. A girl of sharp wit and energetic disposition, she found no joy or fulfillment in a life comprised of endless scholarly studies, ritual prayers, and meditations. The kami offered her some solace, especially the playful air kami to which she was attuned, but that was the only bright spot in a life she otherwise found deeply wearisome. For Beniha, life in the temples was simply dull, and she feared that her whole life would be one long trial of boredom.

That changed when Beniha was chosen, almost by chance, to serve as a court shugenja at Kyuden Doji. The assignment was intended to last only a single season, but the moment Asahina Beniha stepped into the court chambers of the palace, she knew she had found her home. The art of politics, the subtle interplay of words, the clever witticisms and calculated flirtations, all of these things captivated her. She attached herself to Doji Soh, an experienced Crane diplomat. Soh took the eager young shugenja under her wing, teaching her the ways of court, and watched as Beniha blossomed in a single season into a startlingly effective courtier.

For Beniha, this time in the courts came as a revelation. This was her true home, she realized, and it was here that she could truly serve the Crane Clan with all her heart and soul. When the time came for her to return to the Asahina lands, she went to her lord and humbly prostrated herself, begging to be allowed to train in the ways of court and to serve the Clan in the way she was sure the Fortunes meant her to serve. She brought with her letters from Soh and a dozen other prominent Crane courtiers, all recommending that she be sent back to court for the benefit of the Crane Clan. Her daimyo, in keeping with Asahina tradition, did not try to force her

to remain, and the following year Beniha enrolled in the dojo of Shizuka Toshi.

In her new life as a courtier, Beniha has continued to thrive, developing an acerbic wit that has humbled more than one political rival, and skillfully embracing the Doji method of networking and favor-trading. She is sometimes perceived as a superficial young woman, obsessed with politics and court intrigue to the exclusion of all else, and too easily jumping at any chance to display her clever tongue. But to think this is all there is to Asahina Beniha is to do her a disservice. Beneath her seemingly shallow exterior, she is a young woman of honor and dedication, and she finds great joy in her ability to serve her Clan skillfully and well. Nor has she altogether forgotten her lessons in Shinden Asahina. Beniha is still a pious woman at heart, respectful of the power of the kami she commands. And if she sometimes comes across as shallow, who can say this is not at least partly a calculated pose, to lead her political opponents to underestimate her?

DOJI AYANO

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 4
Awareness: 4		Willpower: 3		Perception: 4
Honor: 4.7		Status: 1.0		Glory: 3.8

SCHOOL/RANK: Doji Courtier 2/Doji Innocent 1

SKILLS: Artisan: Origami 4, Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 4, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Games: Letters 2, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Heraldry 3, Meditation 2, Storytelling (Poetry) 4, Tea Ceremony 3

ADVANTAGES: Bente's Blessing, Ebisu's Blessing, Cadence

DISADVANTAGES: Idealistic

Doji Ayano was born into a family which highly respected the ways of Bushido – all of its virtues, especially Honor. Her father was trained as a Kakita duelist, and served the Clan with unbending principle, on one occasion offering his life to his lord because he was unable to win a duel with a single strike. Her mother was an artisan, a master of dance and ikebana, and Ayano grew up in a home suffused with beauty and harmony. She was taught from earliest childhood that without Honor, a samurai has nothing at all. These lessons sank deeply into her soul, and as she grew older, she came to see Bushido as the source of all that was good and noble in Rokugan.

As Ayano grew up, she showed an innate talent for speaking with eloquence and beauty, while lacking much talent for her mother's art or her father's swordsmanship. Although her father insisted that she study the ways of the blade, by the time she was old enough to begin formal schooling, it was clear she would never be more than a middling swordswoman. Accordingly, her parents reluctantly arranged for her to attend the Doji Courtier School. Ayano flourished there, quickly and intuitively understanding the power and value of a well-placed word or a suitable favor. However, she found it difficult to fully accept some aspects of her teaching, especially the necessity of lying in order to advance one's goals in court. To Ayano, lying would not only violate the virtue of Honesty but would also breach her own carefully maintained sense of Honor. Others at the School saw this unwillingness to compromise as a weakness, endangering the success of the Crane Clan, but Ayano found her resolve only strengthened with each passing year. She fell in with a handful of other students who shared her unease with the need to lie and deceive, and together they formed the group known as the Doji Innocents.

After her gempukku, Ayano was initially assigned to one of the minor courts in Crane lands. Her superiors did not expect her to be particularly effective, given her exceptionally rigid code of behavior. However, within a few months Ayano was able to arrange several successful minor treaties and agreements. She found she could use her sense of Honor not only to preserve her own sense of morality but also as an offensive weapon, turning her own ethical purity into a blade as sharp as any Kakita blade. Few rival courtiers could resist her appeals to their honor, even when they wished to.

Ayano has begun a quick rise through the ranks of the Crane courtiers, gathering many favors, allies, and friends along the way. She has been promoted to serve in

the Crane Clan's most important courts, serving alongside veteran courtiers like Doji Nagori, and so far she has not disappointed. Ayano's powerful sense of Honor has proven especially effective at dealing with the Scorpion, since she cannot be swayed by their usual lures and temptations, but is still able to play the game of politics aptly. More than one of the Crane Clan's newest up-and-coming young courtiers now look to Ayano as an example of how all the virtues of Bushido can work in tandem with the Clan's political goals in court.

DOJI CHOSHI

Air: 4	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 4	Void: 4
Awareness: 5				

Honor: 1.9	Status: 2.5	Glory: 3.2
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SCHOOL/RANK: Doji Courtier 4

SKILLS: Artisan: Origami 2, Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Political Maneuvering) 5, Deceit (Lying, Intimidation) 6, Etiquette (Sincerity) 3, Games: Go 2, Games: Letters 3, Lore: Heraldry 4, Lore: History 2, Meditation 2, Perform: Dance 4, Perform: Song 3, Tea Ceremony 2, Theology 2



ADVANTAGES: Allies (Daidoji family), Heartless

DISADVANTAGES: Bad Reputation (ruthless), Driven (accumulate power)

Doji Choshi has always been an ambitious woman, from the moment she first entered the dojo at Shizuka Toshi. From her first posting, she took an extremely aggressive approach to politics, manipulating others without hesitation or restraint, and freely employing blackmail and falsehood. Her willingness to use such ruthless, decisive tactics on behalf of the Crane Clan caught the eye of Daidoji Shihei. He was one of the courtiers who served as the 'eyes' of the Daidoji Harriers in respectable society, and he recruited her to perform similar work.

Choshi was at first horrified by the Harriers' methods and philosophy, which made her own methods seem tame by comparison. The thought that any Crane might use gaijin pepper, assassination, or poison was shocking to her. However, Shihei assured her the Harriers operated with the sanction of the lords of the Crane, so she put her doubts aside. Soon enough, Choshi's adaptive mind began applying some of the Harrier ideas and tactics to court situations. The Harriers destroyed their enemies any way they could, and Choshi adopted

similar methods for dealing with major rivals or enemies in court, such as framing them for dishonorable deeds or pushing them lethal duels. Her earlier doubts and questions vanished, and she embraced this new approach with enthusiasm.

This strategy worked perfectly until a couple of years ago, when she was managing some trade negotiations in the Phoenix lands. After a duel disposed of a Scorpion rival, her assistant, Doji Saori, abruptly turned on her and began demanding more control over how the negotiations were to proceed. Choshi was furious and frightened, but she had no choice but to agree—Shihei had warned her in no uncertain terms that she was not to draw unusual attention to herself or to the ones she served.

The fall of the Harriers has forced Choshi to adjust her approach. With her source of justification gone, she has been forced to consider her own position and make plans for the future. Rather than give up her methods, she has decided to continue them on her own, attempting to accumulate as much power and influence as she can for herself. She has not forgiven Saori, and intends to gather so much power that the next time they meet, it will be completely clear which of them is truly in charge.



DOJI HIBARIKO, BITTER BETROTHED**Air:** 3 **Earth:** 1 **Fire:** 3 **Water:** 2 **Void:** 3

Awareness: 4 Willpower: 3 Perception: 3

Honor: 4.0 **Status:** 1.0 **Glory:** 1.5**SCHOOL/RANK:** Doji Courtier 1/Doji Innocent 1**SKILLS:** Artisan: Origami 4, Calligraphy 4, Commerce 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Lore: Heraldry 1, Perform: Dance 2, Storytelling (Poetry) 3, Tea Ceremony 3**ADVANTAGES:** Balance, Benten's Blessing, Clear Thinker, Meek**DISADVANTAGES:** Bitter Betrothal (Bayushi Hisoka), Low Pain Threshold, Sworn Enemy (Bayushi Hisoka), Weakness (Stamina)

Doji Hibariko is the youngest child of a Crane provincial daimyo of severe traditionalist bent. Although the family is of noble blood, their line is not the most prominent, and their current position is the highest they can hope for. As such, while Hibariko never knew hardship growing up, neither did she or her older brother, Doji Tsubakito, wallow in the luxuries afforded to those of the highest station. Furthermore, as a child she was badly overshadowed by her brother. While Tsubakito proved over and over that he was as equally skilled with a sword as with words, and had an intelligent mind to back it up, Hibariko showed herself distinctly weak and of poor constitution, a frail girl without the energy or focus for a career in the courts. Her father soon dismissed her as unworthy of being anything other than a samurai's dutiful wife, and thereafter treated her as nothing more than an asset for the family to negotiate away in some useful marriage alliance.

In order to protect herself from the pain of her father's dismissal and bitter insults, Hibariko forged a mental strength that her body simply couldn't match. She swore to herself that being 'weak' could be its own form of strength, and that she could serve the Clan without becoming some samurai's mere a trophy wife. To that end she accepted her father's reprimands with humility, learning to turn aside anger and bitterness with soft words and lowered eyes.

By the time of her gempukku, her father had begun sending her to various courts around the Crane lands, hoping she would be noticed enough to attract a worthy suitor. Instead she was noticed by a young courtier

named Doji Ayano. Ayano recognized a kindred soul in Hibariko, and realized that with a little effort, the younger woman could be just as useful as any other member of the court. She privately recommended her to the masters of the Doji Courtier School. Hibariko's father could hardly say no to a personal invitation for his daughter to attend the School. In the Courtier School, Hibariko blossomed, learning to turn her gentle and seemingly submissive persona into a powerful weapon against enemy courtiers. When she returned to the courts, her mild ways and soft voice made her easily overlooked, but she turned this to her advantage. She learned much that the more prominent members of the court could not, as the prominent politicians at court would seldom watch what they said around her.

Recently, much to her dismay, Hibariko has finally been betrothed. Her father has arranged her marriage to a young Bayushi, as part of a recent agreement Doji Nagori and Shosuro Uyeda over trade on the River of Gold. While the details of the marriage were still being worked out, Hibariko acquainted herself with her fiancé, hoping that he might be a pleasant man with whom she could have a harmonious relationship. Much to her dismay, Bayushi Hisoka is her polar opposite in every way possible, a ruthless and sneering courtier who reminds her of her father in all the worst ways. Hibariko knows her duty, and will follow Nagori's orders if the betrothal is ultimately completed – but that doesn't mean she can't quietly make life a living hell for Hisoka, and she intends to do exactly that.

DOJI JORIHIME, WIFE OF NAGORI**Air:** 4 **Earth:** 2 **Fire:** 3 **Water:** 2 **Void:** 4

Perception: 3

Honor: 3.5 **Status:** 3.3 **Glory:** 4.0**SCHOOL/RANK:** Doji Courtier 3**SKILLS:** Artisan: Origami 2, Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 5, Etiquette (Conversation, Sincerity) 6, Games: Go 3, Games: Sadane 3, Investigation 3, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 2, Lore: Law 2, Meditation 3, Storytelling (Poetry) 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology (Fortunism, Shintao) 3**ADVANTAGES:** Cadence, Friendly Kami, Friend of the Elements (Air), Benten's Blessing**DISADVANTAGES:** Low Pain Threshold, Small, True Love (Doji Nagori)

Doji Jorihime was born into a prominent Crane political family, niece to Doji Seishiro, one of the Clan's most significant court figures. While she was still a child, she began hearing a voice in the gardens of her family's estate, a playful voice which never seemed to speak words she could understand. It was the voice of an Air kami, and it had chosen her as its friend. Although Jorihime was never able to learn the true ways of shugenja, her little friend has remained with her throughout her life, always trying to help her as best it can – though sometimes this help can become more of an obstacle, such as when the kami tries to keep dust from landing in her hair.

Jorihime was a well-spoken and supremely well-mannered child, and her parents arranged for her to attend the Doji Courtier School. After completing her initial schooling and gempukku four years ago, her first court assignment sent her to Shiro Sano Kakita during the Chrysanthemum Festival. There she saw, for the first time, the great Crane storyteller Doji Nagori. Jorihime was instantly smitten, her heart utterly lost. As a loyal and honorable Crane, she knew there was little chance that she could ever fulfill her love – most likely, she would be required to make an arranged marriage for the good of the Clan. Nevertheless, she set out to make herself into one of the Clan's greatest courtiers, hoping against hope that she might somehow be able to make herself worthy of a marriage to Nagori.

Jorihime's opportunity came when she was invited to join her uncle Seishiro at the Imperial Winter Court of 1169. The Crane delegation encountered severe problems early in the winter when one of their senior courtiers was goaded into a terrible public loss of face by Chancellor Bayushi Kaukatsu. Seishiro had to spend much of the remaining winter repairing the damage from this incident, and delegated many of his negotiations to Jorihime. Her success in dealing with the Dragon, Lion, and Crab delegations drew the favorable attention of not only her uncle but also of Imperial Advisor Doji Tanitsu and the Otomo daimyo, Hoketuhime. Delighted by Jorihime's combination of honor, skill, and determination, they quietly petitioned for her to marry Nagori.

Jorihime's path was still not a smooth one, however. She had to fend off several other courtship efforts and marriage proposals, as well as surviving a frame-up attempt by Scorpion agents, before she was finally able to

attain her dream. Since her marriage, she has emerged as a major player in the Crane courts, working alongside her husband to protect and maintain the Clan's interests. With a child now on the way, her life is complete... so long as nothing happens to Nagori.

DOJI NAGORI, CRANE STORYTELLER AND HERO

Air: 4	Earth: 2	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 5
Awareness: 5		Intelligence: 5		Perception: 4
Honor: 2.6		Status: 6.0		Glory: 7.9

SCHOOL/RANK: Kakita Artisan 3/Doji Courtier 2

SKILLS: Acting (Mimicry) 3, Artisan: Origami 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Political Maneuvering) 7, Defense 3, Deceit (Lying, Seduction) 4, Etiquette (Conversation, Sincerity) 8, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: History 3, Lore: Myth and Legend 5, Storytelling 8, Tea Ceremony 3

ADVANTAGES: Ally (Doji Yasuyo), Benten's Blessing, Cadence, Dangerous Beauty, Multiple Schools, True Friend (Doji Jorihime), Sacred Weapon (Kakita's First Blade), Voice

DISADVANTAGES: Lechery (2), Soft-Hearted

Doji Nagori was born in the lap of luxury, surrounded by beauty and pleasure. As the cousin of the Crane Clan Champion, he never wanted for anything, and servants waited at his beck and call. He quickly came to love life with all its beauties, and was determined to enjoy all it could offer. He was a gregarious child and made many friends, running wild through the town, playing pranks and doing whatever came to their minds. Nagori would always escape the consequences of his acts with an affable smile and an abashed look. He adored his older sister Yasuyo, who was beautiful, kind, and dedicated to her duty as a bushi. While she did not join in on his antics, Yasuyo usually condoned his pranks and encouraged his high-spiritedness.

It was also during this childhood that Nagori started on his path as a storyteller. He began memorizing the stories he loved best and retelling them to the other children. The year before his gempukku, he attended the Imperial Winter Court with his sister Yasuyo and his cousin, Doji Kurohito, the Clan Champion. Nagori enjoyed his stay at Winter Court immensely, making new friends and conversing with some of the greatest minds in the Empire. Many veteran Crane courtiers, noting his curiosity, charm, and talent, marked him as a potential rival in the future. For Nagori and his sis-

ter, that court taught very separate lessons. Whereas Yasuyo felt inspired to work harder to become a great samurai, Nagori learned how much fun it was to tell stories while beautiful women hung on his every word.

It was obvious to all that Nagori should be sent to the Kakita Artisan Academy to study storytelling. There, despite his mischievous nature, he applied himself with the same determination that his older sister had shown for the sword, and when the time came for his gempukku ceremony he was invited to the prestigious Topaz Championship. There he befriended a young, low-born bushi named Daidoji Hachi.

Nagori did not seek a major post appropriate to his bloodline, but instead requested to be given a very minor role in Kyuden Doji. There he was just one courtier among many, and the political powers in the court quickly dismissed him as a philanderer who posed no threat. This reaction was just fine for Nagori, who was then free to do whatever he wished. He devoted the minimal time and effort required to his official duties and spent the rest of his time creating poetry, telling stories, and wooing all the beautiful women he could find.

Nagori's pleasant life was transformed by a series of events in the year 1158. Early in the year, his sister Yasuyo woke Nagori in the middle of the night to tell him

that she was leaving to fulfill a quest. Nagori had always adored his sister, and her sudden departure shook him deeply. Soon after Yasuyo's disappearance, his friend Hachi, now Yauski Hachi, won the Emerald Championship. Though Nagori had not kept up with the political climate of the Empire, he instinctively realized his friend was in over his head. Although some men might have distanced themselves from Hachi, Nagori did not, despising the very thought of such cowardice. He appointed himself as Hachi's political advisor and threw himself into the struggle to rebuild the Empire's respect for the office of the Emerald Champion.

For the first time in his life, Nagori had a higher goal in life, and he embraced it with all his heart. He set aside his cavalier attitude and joined the retinue of the Emerald Champion alongside Bayushi Norachai, following Hachi as he traveled across the Empire. He spread word of Hachi's deeds and created magnificent stories of Hachi's greatest adventures. He appeared in many courts on Hachi's behalf and worked tirelessly to ensure his friend was respected as a capable and honorable Emerald Champion. In brief, Nagori grew up, becoming a true samurai who served his lord and Clan.

When Yasuyo returned from her quest, she was surprised by the drastic change in her younger brother. He was still the friendly man she remembered, but now he



accepted his duties and met them with the same cheerful enthusiasm he once put into seducing women. He had grown from a charming storyteller into a savvy, well-traveled political manipulator. When the Imperial Court was reformed, it was natural that Nagori would go to serve the Crane there. Later, when Doji Domotai became Clan Champion and needed a reliable political advisor, it was equally natural that Nagori should become her Chancellor.

Nagori was deeply grieved to hear of his friend Hachi's death in the Shadowlands, and the current struggle for the throne fills him with concern. Although he is honored to carry the first blade of Kakita, retrieved from the Tomb of the Seven Thunders, he wonders if he is truly worthy of such a gift, and the admiration which younger Crane courtiers show for him strikes him as something he does not wholly deserve. Perhaps that is why he has finally taken the last steps to maturity by marrying his admirer Doji Jorihime.

DOJI SAORI, ENLIGHTENED DUELIST

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 5
Perception: 4

Honor: 2.2 Status: 2.0 Glory: 3.4

SCHOOL/RANK: Doji Courtier 2/Kakita Bushi 2

KATA: Kakita's First Stance, Watchful Falcon

SKILLS: Artisan: Ikebana 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Defense 2, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Iaijutsu 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 2, Lore: Dueling 6, Lore: Law 5, Meditation 3, Storytelling (Poetry) 2, Tea Ceremony 2

ADVANTAGES: Higher Purpose (enlightenment through lethal dueling), Multiple Schools, Social Position (Iaijutsu Officiator)

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Secret (studying shourido), Sworn Enemy (Doji Choshi)

Doji Saori is a well-known court figure, and while not the most prominent among those who attend the Emperor's court, in lesser regional courts she is known, respected, and sometimes feared as mediator and officiator, and is always in high demand.

In her youth, Saori displayed aptitude for both the blade and the court. After some deliberation, her parents decided to seek leave for her to attend the Kakita Dueling Academy. Saori acquitted herself well there, and passed her gempukku with honor and distinc-

tion. Only a year after her gempukku, however, Saori was involved in a dueling accident during practice: a reckless opponent wounded her sword arm. The injury ultimately required nearly two years to fully heal. In the interim, Saori was granted leave to attend the Doji Courtier School so that she might still serve her Clan. Fortunately, her skill there proved to be equal to her skill with the blade, just as her youthful promise had suggested, although she did not enjoy the ways of court as much as she did the weight of steel in her hands. To overcome her disappointment, she began studying the laws surrounding duels and the reputations of prominent duelists throughout the Empire.

After taking up her duties as a courtier, Saori was assigned as an attendant at the court of Clan Champion Doji Kurohito. On a particularly cool and pleasant spring morning, a group of guests enjoying the Doji gardens were disrupted by an unpleasant argument between one of the Kakita in attendance and an especially belligerent guest from the Dragon Clan. For a moment, it seemed as though the Dragon's tempestuous nature would explode into violence, but Saori stepped forward and, using her knowledge of dueling protocols, defused the situation and arranged for a proper test of skill to settle the dispute without bloodshed. Saori hastily composed correspondence to the Kakita's daimyo as well as his Dragon counterpart apologizing for conducting the test without their express permission, but her actions ultimately resolved the matter to the satisfaction of everyone involved. Soon after, she found herself dispatched to another court to officiate over a dueling tournament. After that time, Saori became a common sight in the courts of more martially inclined daimyo throughout the Empire. She is among the most knowledgeable dueling officiators in her family, and often arranges tournaments and demonstrations of skill between aspiring young duelists. She is an excellent judge of skill, and always arranges for opponents to face someone of an equivalent level, ensuring that all matches are fair and interesting to observers.

However, since her arm's health recovered and she began dueling again, Saori's life has taken some strange turns. In 1169 Saori was assigned to assist Doji Choshi in the courts, and soon discovered that the Harrier liaison had a knack for arranging lethal duels to dispose of enemies of the Clan. At one point Saori was forced by Choshi's demand to fight a lethal duel with a Scorpi-

on. Afterward, as she struggled with how to square her actions with the code of Bushido, Saori met a strange gaijin named Garen. He pointed out flaws and inconsistencies in the Code and Bushido, and introduced her to the notion of other virtues, virtues such as Perfection and Strength. Saori found this ideas enthralling, and bolstered by her new understanding she confronted Choshi and demanded more control over their activities. Perhaps more significantly, she found a new purpose and serenity for herself, and came to see her acts not as unnecessary killings but as acts possessing a sort of enlightening purity. Whether any monk of the Brotherhood would consider this true Enlightenment is debatable, but Saori feels no doubt that she has at last found her true path in life.

New Mechanics

The following section contains new mechanical options for Crane Clan characters.

New Basic School: Kakita Jester (Courtier)

Rokugani Jesters are expected to sing, dance, tell stories, make slightly inaccurate quotes from famous books, and generally make sure any samurai knows when he or she does something inappropriate. They usually speak in rhymes or riddles, giving them a certain philosophical kinship to the Dragon tattooed men. They also have a habit of foretelling doom for anyone who criticizes or attacks them. It should be noted, however, that Rokugani jesters never behave in a light-hearted or "wacky" manner – their humor is satiric and often sour, and their favored tool is biting mockery.

Benefit: +1 Intelligence

Honor: 2.5

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation), Deceit, Etiquette (Conversation), Performance: Jester 2, Storytelling (Poetry), any one High Skill.

Outfit: Jester Outfit, wakizashi, kimono and sandals, traveling pack, 10 koku.

Techniques

RANK 1: ARTIST OF MOCKERY

The Jester is taught to rely on his skills of mockery and entertainment to maintain his position in the court, and to please the nobles whose favor is needed to maintain his safety. You gain a bonus equal to your Insight Rank to all rolls made with your School Skills. Also, you do not lose Glory or Honor for engaging in public mockery or insult against other figures in the court, so long as you do so in your official role as a Jester.

RANK 2: CONTROLLER OF EMOTION

The Jester has learned how to emotionally manipulate others. If you speak with a chosen target for at least 10 minutes and make a successful Courtier (Manipulation) Skill Roll against a TN of 25, you can cause the target to feel a particular emotion or mood (your choice). While affected by this technique, the target's School Skill Rolls either gain either a +1k0 bonus or suffer a -1k0 penalty, as appropriate depending on the emotion evoked (use GM's discretion), for a number of hours equal to your School Rank. A character may only be targeted with this effect once per day, and will know that he is being influenced.

RANK 3: TONGUE OF ACID

A Jester's home is at court, where the only form of violence which occurs is that of the duel. The Jester's innate ability to understand basic human emotions and impulses allows him to provoke a fight, even in an otherwise unlikely location like the gardens and chambers of court. Although designed for court, this technique can also work in a skirmish to lure someone into direct combat – luring an archer from safe cover, taunting an opposing shugenja into rushing into melee, and so forth.

To use this technique, you must perform – engaging in mockery, spouting poems and perverse aphorisms, etc. – within sight and hearing of the target for 2 rounds, using a Use Special Abilities Action each turn. At the end of the second round, you make an Opposed Skill Roll against your target, using your Performance: Jester Skill against his Willpower/Etiquette. If he loses, he will immediately launch a physical attack on the nearest available enemy. However, he may make a Test of Honor against a TN of 20 to resist this effect.



Conditions must be conducive to conflict (high levels of tension, incipient violence, etc.) in order for this technique to work, and it cannot cause anyone to attack his lord or a similar authority figure, or to act against his basic nature (pacifistic characters cannot be forced into violence by this technique, characters will not attack a True Friend, etc.).

RANK 4: MASTER OF EMOTION

The Jester has become truly adept at manipulating the emotional states of others. If you speak with a chosen target for at least 10 minutes and make a successful Courtier (Manipulation) Skill Roll against a TN of 25, you can cause the target to feel a particular emotion or mood (your choice). While affected by this Ability, the target's School Skill Rolls either gain either a +1k1 bonus or suffer a -1k1 penalty, as appropriate depending on the emotion evoked (use GM's discretion), for a number of hours equal to your School Rank. A character may only be targeted with this effect once per day, and will know that he is being influenced. This replaces the benefit of Rank 2 School Technique.

In addition, you now gain a bonus equal to your twice your Insight Rank to all Rolls made with your School Skills. This replaces the benefit of the Rank 1 School Technique.

RANK 5: MOCKERY HAS NO LIMITS

The Jester has become skilled enough to pull hapless onlookers into his comedic acts. Anytime you perform in public, you can target someone in the audience, who then becomes the focus of your deadly wit. If the you defeat your target in an Opposed Skill Roll pitting your Performance: Jester Skill against his Awareness/Etiquette, the target suffers a painful public loss of face, accompanied by a loss of Glory and Honor points equal to your School Rank. You may not target the same person with this technique twice in less than 3 months.

Basic School: Kakita Artisan Refinements

These are two new Rank 1 options for the Kakita Artisan School.

Origami: Folding paper is an ancient art in Roku-gan, respected for the incredible precision and delicacy it demands. You have not only mastered this skill, but you have learned to study others and quickly determine what manner of origami gift would best suit them. You make a Raw Perception Roll against a TN equal to the target's Awareness x 5, adding twice your Artisan School Rank to the total of the roll. If the roll succeeds, you have determined the most appropriate origami gift for this person, and may craft it given paper, 10 minutes, and if you make a successful Artisan: Origami Skill Roll against a TN of 15. If the gift is accepted, you gain a Free Raise to all Social Skill Rolls made involving that individual for the next month.

Gardening: The art of gardening is much like the arts of bonsai and ikebana, but on a larger scale. Kakita artisans who study gardening can create gardens with unique patters of spiritual energy, offering a sense of harmony and peace to visitors. You may arrange a garden in this way by making a successful Awareness/Artisan: Gardening Roll against a TN determined by the garden's size – TN 15 for a small garden attached to a private residence, TN 25 for a garden at a normal palace, TN 50 for the Imperial gardens of Toshi Ranbo, etc. The work associated with this roll consumes a number of weeks equal to one-tenth the TN (rounded up). If the roll is successful, the garden becomes a place of spiritual harmony. Any visitors to the garden gain a bonus equal to your Artisan School Rank to the total of any Meditation Skill Rolls made there. This bonus lasts for a number of months equal to your Artisan School Rank.

New Path: Daidoji Trading Council (Courtier)

The Daidoji Trading Council handles the Crane Clan's commercial interests, a disreputable but important task. Here, as with the other duties they perform for the Crane Clan, the Daidoji accept the price of doing what must be done to ensure the Clan's success and prosperity. In addition to handling commerce directly, the Trading Council is a valuable source of information for the Crane Clan's courtiers – knowing the economic condition of rival Clans can be a vital tool in diplomatic negotiations.

Technique Rank: 1

Path of Entry: None. This is an entry-level Path.

Path of Egress: Doji Courtier 1, Doji Magistrate 1, or Daidoji Yojimbo 1

Benefit: +1 Awareness

Honor: 2.5

Skills: Commerce (Merchant) 2, Courtier, Defense, Etiquette, any two High or Bugei Skills.

Outfit: Wakizashi; two kimonos and two pairs of sandals, one kimono and pair of sandals (Fine Quality), steed, traveling pack; 15 Koku

TECHNIQUE: DAIKOKU'S FAVOR

The Daidoji Trading Council is not the most honorable of organizations, but unlike the recently disbanded Harriers, it is respected for the work it does in the Crane Clan's name. At character creation you gain 10 bonus Character Points that can only be used on the following Advantages: Allies, Blackmail, Inheritance, Servant, Social Position, or Wealthy. You also gain a bonus equal to your Air Ring to all Awareness Trait Rolls and Awareness-based Skill Rolls.

New Path: Hoturi's Blade (Bushi)

Doji Hoturi was one of the greatest Crane heroes of modern memory, a shining example of everything it means to be Crane, excelling in both the courts and on the battlefield. It was Hoturi who saved his Clan from the terrible onslaught of his false duplicate, created from the Egg of P'an Ku. It was Doji Hoturi who was the second Crane Thunder, and gave his life to bring down the dark god.

Hoturi's example has inspired a small group of samurai within the Clan who seek to emulate his combined mastery of both dueling and politics. They maintain a small dojo on the outskirts of the Kakita Dueling Academy.

Technique Rank: 3

Requirements: Courtier 4, Iaijutsu 4, Kenjutsu 4

Path of Entry: Kakita Bushi 2

Path of Egress: Doji Courtier 1

Technique: The Blade of Whispers

Although the followers of Doji Hoturi's legacy are primarily warriors and duelists, they seek to emulate Hoturi's tradition of excellence in the courts as well, and train themselves accordingly. A true devotee of the Doji

technique, they claim, knows there is no difference between a duel of steel and a duel of words. A number of times per day equal to your Insight Rank, after making an Iaijutsu or Courtier Skill Roll, you may spend a Void Point to keep all of the dice you rolled.

New Path: Daidoji Spy (Bushi)

Although the notorious Daidoji Harriers have been disbanded, the Daidoji family's service to the Crane Clan has always included espionage and information gathering, assembling the vital secrets which the Doji need to dominate the courts. To facilitate this task, some Daidoji yojimbo are given supplemental training in less-than-honorable methods. Such bushi appear to be no different from their more conventional comrades, but when the time is right, they have the skills to "acquire" whatever secrets their courtier charge might need.

Technique Rank: 3

Requirements: Investigation 3, Stealth 3.

Path of Entry: Daidoji Yojimbo 2, Daidoji Harrier 2

Path of Egress: Same school as entry at Rank 3

TECHNIQUE: TRUTH IN SHADOWS

Those Daidoji who undertake this path of training are far more than just muscle, although they are careful to conceal this from everyone. They are trained to take careful note of the needs of their courtier charge, and act accordingly to acquire whatever documents, information, or other evidence might be required. You gain a bonus equal to twice your Insight Rank to all Stealth, Deceit, and Investigation Skill Rolls. You lose no Honor points when you must use Low Skills or perform questionable deeds on behalf of the Crane Clan. However, you still lose Honor for learning Low Skills, or for performing truly heinous acts like murder.

New Path: Master of Dance (Courtier)

Among the Crane, the art of dance is greatly prized, and many who train as courtiers nevertheless pursue the art of dance with such fervor that the Kakita Artisan Academy offers them a limited course of specialized instruction. It should be noted that Rokugani dance is traditionally a predominantly feminine art, although male artisans of exceptional grace and talent have occasionally been known to practice it.

Technique Rank: 3

Path of Entry: Doji Courtier 2

Path of Egress: Doji Courtier 3 or Kakita Artisan 1 (discipline Dance)

TECHNIQUE: PERFECT GRACE

You gain a +2k1 bonus to all Performance: Dance Skill Rolls. Also, when performing in a public place, you gain a bonus equal to your Fire Ring to your Performance: Dance Skill Rolls.

New Path: Doji Innocents (Courtier)

The Doji family has traditionally accepted to need to compromise its understanding of Bushido slightly, particularly with regard to the Virtue of Honesty. Effective diplomacy requires a willingness to lie and deceive, an unpleasant reality which the Doji have dealt with as best they can. Recently, however, some among the Crane have rejected this pragmatic approach in favor of fully embracing all the virtues of Bushido, even in court. Although this approach is regarded with scepticism by the majority of the Clan's courtiers, it has achieved some success, and the Crane have allowed its pioneers to begin teaching their ways to others.

Technique Rank: 2

Requirements: Honor Rank 3.0 or better, or the Idealistic Disadvantage. You may not have the Disadvantage Bad Reputation.

Path of Entry: Doji Courtier 1

Path of Egress: Doji Courtier 2

TECHNIQUE: THE POWER OF INNOCENCE

Your idealistic view of Bushido infuses your approach to diplomacy and courtly negotiations. So long as your Honor Rank is at least 3.0, you gain a bonus equal to twice your Honor Rank to any Courtier or Etiquette Skill Roll. However, you cannot use the Deceit Skill for any purpose whatsoever.

New Advantage: Blissful Betrothal [Granted] (3 Points)

Your character is happily betrothed. Perhaps your spouse is rich or well-connected, or perhaps you have been fortunate enough to have found true love. Either way, the betrothal is beneficial to both sides. You gain a significant political connection to your betrothed's

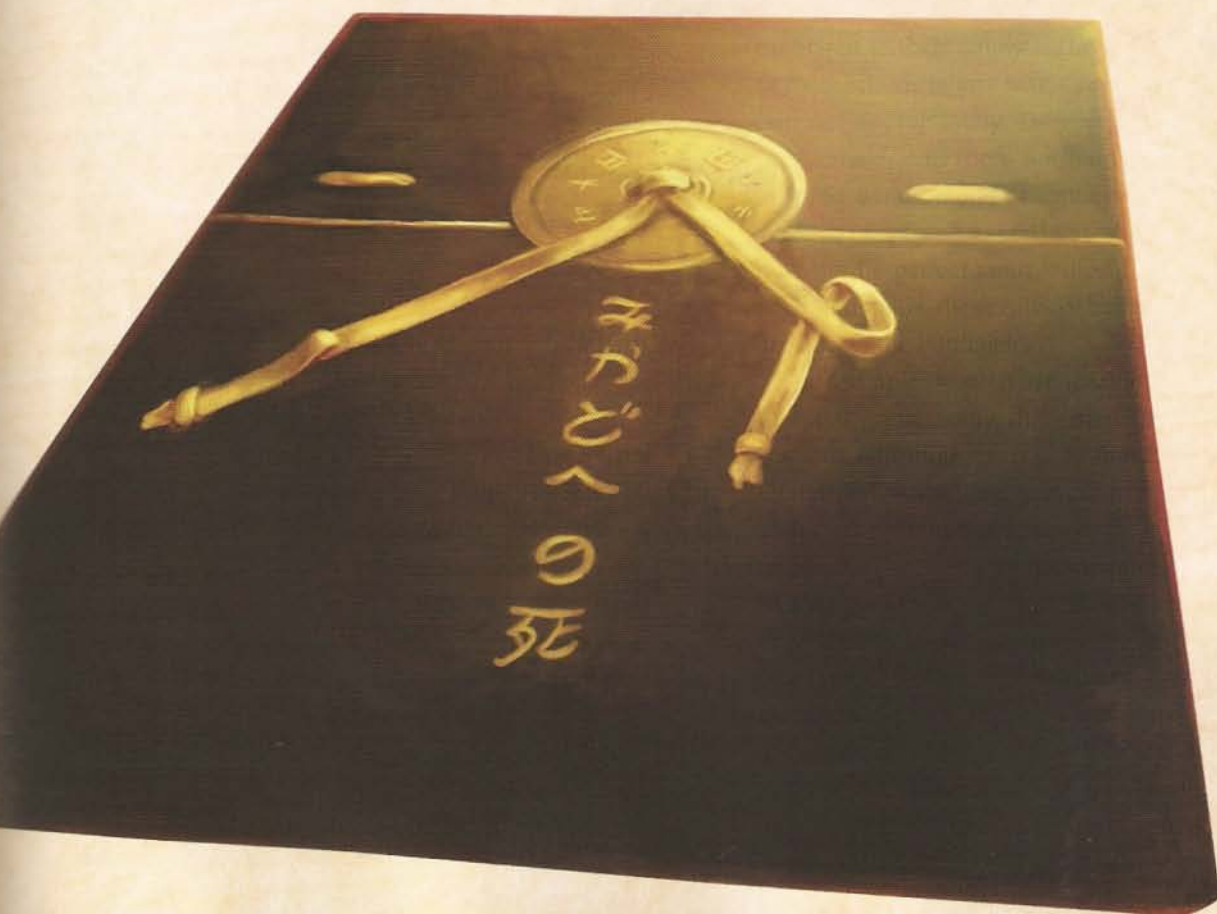
family, and with the GM's permission you may purchase any 3 of the following advantages for a 2-point discount: Gentry, Wealth, Social Position, Ally (with your betrothed only), and Kharmic Tie (with your betrothed only). You will not actually receive the benefit of these new Advantages until after the wedding ceremony, which will take place within 1 year. Such a perfect match does not come without difficulties and hazards, however. You will have to see to your spouse's welfare and safety, and disgruntled suitors may cast a dark eye on your happy household.

New Advantage: Cadence [Inherent] (Crane only; 3 Points)

Cadence is the secret sign-language of Crane courtiers and artisans, capable of encoding detained information into a song, poem, speech, a work of art, or even something as simple as the wave of a fan. Any basic, simple idea or piece of information (such as "delay them" or "this favors us") can be conveyed in this way to another Crane who knows Cadence. This secret method is never taught to a non-Crane, even one trained in a Crane school.

New Advantage: Correspondence [Granted] (Courtier only, 1 Point)

You have a friend in another Clan or faction elsewhere in the Empire, with whom you regularly exchange letters. You may have never actually met this friend, or you may have encountered each other at court. Regardless, the two of you write each other regularly, keeping one another abreast of current events in your respective domains. This provides you with a great source of information about other parts of Rokugan, but grants your correspondent the same benefit, and he (or she) will come to see you as a reliable friend and ally. With the GM's permission, you may purchase the True Friend and/or Ally Advantages with your correspondent for 2 fewer points. However, if you ever take longer than a month to reply to one of your correspondent's letters, this Advantage is permanently lost. You can try to re-establish communication, but something fundamental in your relationship has been lost, and you will never become true friends or allies without a major reconciliation effort on your part. This advantage can only be taken by a character with at least 1 Rank in a Courtier School or Path.





New Advantage: Darling of the Court [Granted] (4 Points)

You have unexpectedly gained the attention and approval of a very high ranking member of Rokugani political society – a family daimyo, Clan Champion, an Imperial authority like the Chancellor or Imperial Herald, or possibly even the Emperor (when there is an Emperor). Although you may have spoken with this person only once, courtiers and Imperial hangers-on have noticed the attention you received, and hope some of this favor will rub off on them. This can be troublesome, but ultimately such attention can only help your Clan pursue its goals. For the next year, your Glory and Status are considered to be 1 Rank higher in social situations. During this time you may spend 2 Experience points to take any of your new-found sycophants as permanent Allies (1 point Influence, 1 point Devotion). However, the attention span of the Court is short, and after this year has passed, this Advantage goes away forever and cannot be regained. Any Allies you purchased remain loyal, but they no longer hang on your every word... and everyone else seems to forget your name.

New Advantage: Glib Tongue [Granted] (Courtier only, 3 points)

You have a natural talent for talking persuasively. Even if you are physically unattractive, unlikable, or your voice is the harsh croak of a dying crow, your words still carry a compelling weight of their own, and your training as a courtier has enhanced that weight to the point where you can easily sway people to your point of view. Any time you are attempting to sway someone's opinions in conversation (whether honestly or dishonestly) or present an image of sincerity and truth (whether legitimate or not), you gain a bonus equal to your Air Ring to the the appropriate Social Skill Roll (typically Courtier, Etiquette, or Deceit). You may only take this Advantage if you have at least 3 Ranks in a Courtier School. You may not take the Can't Lie or Shallow Disadvantages.

New Advantage: Meek [Inherent] (Courtier only, 3 Points, 2 Points for Miya)

You do not look like a physical threat. In a skirmish, you will tend to be overlooked unless you are having a significant impact on the course of the combat. If you are maintaining a defensive posture, your enemies may not bother to attack you at all. Because you are so non-threatening, you gain a +1k1 bonus to all Social Skill Rolls involving diplomacy or negotiation (even if the negotiation involves something as dire as pleading for your life). This Advantage does not prevent others from questioning, capturing, or verbally harassing you. It should be noted that in most martial Families and Clans, meekness is seen as a curse or a grievous error in one's upbringing – hence, those with this character flaw are only allowed to serve their Clan in the courts. You may only take this Advantage if you select a Courtier School at character creation. You may not take the Large Advantage.

New Disadvantage: Obtuse (Bushu only, 2 Points)

There are a few Rokugani, mostly bushi, to whom the subtleties and pleasures of art, culture, and politics are simply incomprehensible. You are one of them. To you, poems are meaningless babble, paintings are just something to cover holes in the walls, music is a waste of time if you can't dance to it, and dancing is a waste of time unless you're drunk enough to not hear the music. Your soul is simply unmoved by the refinements of civilization and the beauties of culture. With the exception of Lore, Investigation, and Medicine, learning or raising any High Skill costs you double the normal amount of Character Points or Experience Points. In any social or courtly situation, you must call 2 Raises to get the effect of a single Raise. On the other hand, being numb to the finer things is not always a weakness. In court, you tend to be left alone, because you are so oblivious that it is hardly worth the effort even to make fun of you. You may not take the Bente's Blessing Advantage.

New Item: Nio's Kimono

Doji Nio was Lady Doji's second son, and his first kimono was woven by his older sister Doji Konishiko, the Crane Clan Thunder. When he learned of her death, he swore never to wear it again, but on his deathbed many years later, he told his son to keep the kimono and wear it whenever he needed his father's guidance.

Nio's Kimono has shown little to no wear in the many centuries since that day. Indeed, when Kyuden Doji was destroyed during the Clan War, the kimono was discovered undamaged in the rubble. Its sky-blue silk, which shimmers brightly in direct light, is just as clear as it was on the day Nio handed it down to his son, and the embroidered white crane on the back is likewise untouched. Over the centuries, the obi which accompanied the original kimono has been lost, and courtiers who are honored to wear Nio's kimono must choose an obi of their own to use with it – however, rumor has it that only an obi of the finest quality will bring forth the kimono's blessed properties.

Nio's Kimono is infused with the spirit of its first owner, one of the great pioneers of Rokugani culture, politics, and diplomacy. Wearing it grants you a +2k2 bonus to any Awareness Trait Roll or Awareness-based Skill Roll. In addition, so long as you carry no weapons other than a knife or wakizashi and makes no threatening movements, any would-be attackers must make a successful Raw Willpower Roll against a TN of 30 in order to attack you. This roll must be made each time an individual attacker wishes to attack you. The kimono itself is apparently indestructible, although this confers no protective benefits to its wearer.

New Item: Tears of the First Hantei

Hantei's Tears, shed on the occasion of finding his wife, have become some of the most precious artifacts of the Crane Clan, much like the tears of his sister Lady Doji. They were traditionally passed to the Clan Champion's wife on the night of her marriage, but in more recent times the occasional ascension of women to rule the Clan (such as the current Champion, Doji Domotai) has diminished this custom, and today the Tears are simply kept in the Clan Champion's household.



Hantei's Tears comprise 28 small, perfectly-formed tears that appear to be made from pure jade. Each tear is carved with tiny images of cranes. All of the Tears are kept together, in a silken pouch. The Tears are physical expressions of pure and true emotion. Their mystical purity can remove even the Taint of Jigoku from a mortal body and soul. A single tear can completely purge all Shadowlands points from a mortal being, although doing so destroys that Tear. Further, the Tears are infused by the spirit of Hantei's open and honest declaration of his love for Doji Mioko, and the victory of truth over her fisherman father's deception. Rumor claims that even the most skilled courtier can only tell the purest truth in their presence. It is impossible to use the Deceit Skill while standing within 10' of one of the Tears.

Iron Crane Dojo

School: Daidoji Yojimbo

Path: Daidoji Spy, Daidoji Iron Warriors

School Benefit: You may gain a bonus equal to your School Rank to all Deceit Rolls.

Katogama Dojo

Schools: Doji Magistrate, Doji Courtier

School Benefit: The Katogama sensei have devised training programs that enable their students to capitalize on their family's vast knowledge of other Crane Families and techniques. A character trained in this Dojo gains a free Rank in Know the School for a Crane school of his/her choice. In addition, those trained in this Dojo gain a Free Raise when making Courtier (Manipulation) rolls against another member of the Crane Clan.

New Dojo

The mechanics described below follow all rules and guidelines included in Chapter Eight of *The Emerald Empire*.

MASTERS OF COURT



THE SCORPION

1170,
15th Day of the Month of the Hare

“Rarely have I found such a pleasant companion to share the evening meal with,” Moshi Chiasa said, fanning herself ostentatiously. Despite the sea breeze from off the coast of Kyuden Kumiko, the spring air was warm. She allowed her gaze to wander across the white-topped ocean that surrounded the Mantis Clan’s northernmost island, pretending only casual interest in her conversation. “I have found our little chats most enlightening, Katashi-san, and would shudder to think we might never have them again.”

“The thought of never being able to hear the pleasant sound of your voice or bask in the radiance of your presence fills me with just as great a sense of loss,” Doji Katashi said, smiling ever so slightly but never quite making eye contact with the lovely Mantis courtier. He reached down to his side, his fingers delicately running over the inro that was tied to his obi. As he spoke, he carefully pulled its segments apart, piece by piece, and laid its contents in his lap before reassembling them.

“If only there were a way we might never be apart,” the young woman said, just a touch too dramatically. Her eyes wandered to the motion of his hands, as if curious what he might be doing, though her lips curled upwards slightly in a small smile. She slowed the flutter of her fan to conceal it.

“Perhaps there is, Chiasa-sama,” he answered, allowing a hint of nervousness to reach his voice. “I... I would hope, perhaps, that by wearing this... this small token, you might always have a memory of my company with you, a piece of me beside you even when we are far apart.”

“But I could not ask you to part with such an important item for my sake,” she replied, her eyes saying nothing of the sort.

“Upon my own frame, its beauty is... is but a limited thing,” he said, his fingers tracing along the inro, following the lines of a Crane in flight. He seemed to gain a little confidence as he lifted his eyes to hers. “But its colors would grace the lovely eyes of one such as yourself far better. Why should something be left in my hands for its mere utility, when in your presence its beauty might shine forth?”

“But, to take something which has traveled with you for so long, I would never dream of claiming a thing with so many memories attached to it.”

“Ah, but it is those very memories that I would share with you, that I might always be at your side, even when duty demands otherwise... Chiasa-chan,” he said, risking a more familiar address.

She made a feigned gasp and, without a word, bowed to him, in her eyes a silent acceptance of his token. He, in turn, moved forward very gently and coiled the ropes around her obi, tying his inro to it. The motions allowed him the most brief of touches, just enough to barely avoid scandal, but still filled her with a powerful sense of impending closeness.

“If only you did not have to go,” she crooned a touch petulantly, yearning in her voice.

“Would I truly be the man whose company you wish for, if I did not fulfill my lord’s obligations? I will return to you soon, Chiasa-chan,” he said, bowing before her. At a sad nod from her, he reluctantly rose and stepped out of the room.

"Until then, Katashi-kun," she said softly, relishing his intense emotions and exulting in the timeless moment of romantic bliss as the shoji screens closed.

In the darkened shadows beyond the halls of Kyuden Kumiko, Doji Katashi stood beside a lonely tree. One moment, he was alone, and the next he felt a presence behind him. A cold, cunning smile creased his face. "Sama. I have done as you asked."

"Well done, Chihiro-san," a voice said out of the darkness. "This ruse seems to have played well. The information, then; were you able to confirm what it is that Moshi Chiasa's superiors are attempting in the coming summer?"

"I believe the information you gave me is consistent with the hints and implications she has given," the young man replied, dropping the mask of 'Doji Katashi' completely, his face relaxing into a subtly different cast. He slipped a scroll sealed with crimson wax from his sleeve and offered it up to a hand that emerged from the shadows of the tree. "This should be more than enough for us to move to intercept their plans. Use my Crane inro as a means of identifying her in the court when you make your move."

There was a grunt of assent in the other man's voice, but no commitment yet. "We will see. I have new orders for you, Chihiro-san."

"Oh? Then will I be leaving the last vestiges of this court?"

"You will," the unseen figure said, slipping a small note into his delicate hands. "Return when you are prepared, and your travel will be arranged. The fallout of this particular plan might be difficult, were 'Doji Katashi' to still be present for questioning."

"A shame. The Moshi was actually rather pretty," he replied, shrugging. "Still, orders received. I will see you in an hour then."

Without a further word, Shosuro Chihiro walked back to the room that belonged to 'Doji Katashi' and collected his belongings. By the time that the scandal was revealed and Moshi Chiasa disgraced for her hand in it, he would be off of the island and traveling in the Phoenix lands, under the name Shiba Tatsumi. Despite the best efforts of the Mantis magistrates, there would be no indication that a man named Doji Katashi had ever existed.



"Call me whatever name you like," he whispered to himself as he slipped out of the palace for the last time. "Study me for ten years. You still will know only that which I choose to reveal."

The Scorpion Families and the Courtier's Art

The Scorpion Clan has long thrived in the subtle, complex world of Rokugani politics, a world where its tools of deceit, blackmail, trickery, and seduction can be used to their fullest extent. Here the Scorpion courtiers manipulate and deceive, here the sinister Shosuro actors infiltrate other Clans and steal their secrets, here the duelists and poison masters bring ignominious death to those who have earned the enmity of the Clan of Secrets. Other Clans may seek vengeance and glory on the battlefield – the Scorpion content themselves with the quiet and subtly devastating victories of politics, where a samurai's life may be ruined with nothing more than a few choice words.

The Bayushi

Within the courts, there are two sides to the coin of the Scorpion Clan's activities: the Bayushi and the Shosuro. Although none of the Clan's assets have ever been allowed to lie fallow, those two leading Families have long worked in conjunction to navigate and manipulate Rokugani courts and politics. Where there is one, the other is not far behind, and just as their founders were nearly inseparable, so too are they today.

The Bayushi are the 'mask' of the Scorpion Clan. They have served as the Clan's leadership since the dawn of recorded history. It is they who stand at the forefront of the armies of the Clan, arrayed in brilliant crimson and black armor. It is they who sit upon the thrones of the Clan's key provinces, administering the wealthiest and most influential Scorpion lands and resources. It is they most people first think of when they hear the word "Scorpion." And this is exactly as the Bayushi wish it. Both the courts and the battlefield are their arenas of conflict – indeed, they see little difference between the two. And just as a Lion commander will stand before his army, inspiring his troops and drawing his enemy's

attention, so does a Bayushi place himself at the forefront of his Clan, giving friend and foe alike someone to focus upon.

Within the court, it is the Bayushi who are encountered most easily, who represent the Clan at formal diplomatic sessions, who sit in the most visible places at every meeting. By remaining as visible as possible, they both perform the Clan's public work and serve to deflect any undue attention from the other Scorpion Families' necessary work.

One of the rarest and most useful of virtues in the Rokugani courts is the art of patience. A well-wrought political plan can take months or even years to prepare and execute. Proper planning requires time, flexibility, and above all complete information, and the Bayushi are masters of slowly assembling the tools they need to overthrow their enemies. In their view, there is no better place to watch the subtle ebb and flow of the courts than from a daimyo's throne, waiting and watching while the courtiers of more impetuous Clans barter and haggle like so many street merchants. Bayushi lords observe their enemies endlessly while hiding within their pedigreed, manicured, and perfected public images, their unshakable *on* (face) and impenetrable masks. The Bayushi make an art of appearing exactly as they wish others to think that they are, for in the game of politics, appearance is everything. And this false public mask for the Scorpion affords rest of the Clan versatility and freedom of movement.

Of course, the Bayushi bring considerable assets to their Clan's political ventures. They maintain one of the most widely known and acclaimed courtier schools in the empire, teaching skills of deception and manipulation, ferreting out the weaknesses of their foes. Specialized students of their courtier dojos master the art of luring their enemies to destruction with their own desires, or of slowly destroying their reputations a piece at a time. The Bayushi also possess a variety of other capacities that support their political role. They manage much of the wealth of the Clan, maintaining considerable funds to bring to bear on diplomatic negotiations. Being themselves a military family, they can also back their negotiations with the threat of force much more easily than a more strictly political family like the Doji or Kitsuki, and their ranks include skilled duelists to back their courtiers in any challenge. Finally, they foster and maintain a general sense of fearsomeness and

threat, cowing and intimidating their enemies with the sinister reputation of their Clan. It is not unusual for the entrance of a Bayushi into negotiations to force another Clan to rethink their entire strategy.

By tradition, by right, or by less honorable methods, the Bayushi remain eternally pre-eminent among the Scorpion Families, a role they take with great seriousness. Few in the other Families would seek to usurp the Bayushi, for by helping to support the leading family's prominent and intimidating image they ensure the success of the entire Clan. The general's seat and the daimyo's chair both belong to the Bayushi, continuing a dance millennia old, and the Scorpion would not have it any other way.

The Shosuro

The other side of the Scorpion coin is the Shosuro family. Bayushi himself would never have been the man he was if Shosuro had not stood beside him, and this relationship continues to the present day between these Families. While the Bayushi are the public 'face' or mask of the Scorpion Clan, the Shosuro are in many ways the honeyed words and open ears behind that mask, the knife-wielding hand hidden behind the back. The Bayushi are adept at intimidation and threats, but the Shosuro are the real threat that lies implied behind the ominous words of the Bayushi.

Of all of the Scorpion Families, the Shosuro are perhaps the most focused upon the work of politics and the court. The Shosuro positively thrive within the courts, much like fish in water. Where a Bayushi might consider himself a general on a hill, the Shosuro know they are the rank and file soldiers of the Scorpion Clan's forces in court. They tend to prefer a more subtle approach than that of the Bayushi. Where their cousins are aggressive, making themselves visible, the Shosuro prefer to draw less attention to themselves, spreading their influence through whispers.

Like the gilded mask of the Bayushi, the subtlety of the Shosuro is quite calculated and intentional. They are adept at deciphering human emotions and manipulating others, and while their enemies pay attention to the man upon the throne, the Shosuro observe and exploit the weaknesses of their enemies, maneuvering to strike from an unexpected quarter. Much like the famed "two pincers, one tail," maneuver of the Bayushi bushi school, while the claws of the prominent Bayushi hold

the Clan's prey ensnared, it is the poisoned tail of the Shosuro which delivers the key blow.

The Shosuro family carries many weapons in its courtly arsenal. It is the Shosuro who train the shinobi of the Clan, the expert spies and assassins who steal vital information and distract enemy resources. It is the Shosuro poison masters who maintain the family's infamous gardens, with their treasure trove of knowledge about poisons and toxins, and who deliver those poisons to unsuspecting enemies. It is the Shosuro whose butei acting academy produces a wide assortment of skilled spies and assassins who infiltrate the Empire, posing as normal actors or even as members of other Clans. It is the Shosuro who train specialized yojimbo and duelists for service in the courts, to protect Scorpion courtiers from the duelists of the Crane or Lion. Naturally, many Shosuro also train in the Bayushi courtier school, learning their cousins' arts of political intrigue. Thus, the family has a full range of skills and methods with which to strike at enemies in court. Not only that, but one of the Shosuro vassal Families, the Kochako, is charged with enforcing internal security in the Scorpion Clan, protecting it from the disloyal few who hide within its ranks.

On the surface, the Shosuro sometimes appear to the uninformed to be a widely disparate, perhaps even dis-solute, group of people. However, that variety provides the versatility which is the Shosuro strength. The family is quite practical, recognizing those within its ranks who are most suited for each type of work and training them appropriately, and thus operates in a fashion more closely resembling a meritocracy than the more rigid roles played by Families in other Clans. Though the station of daimyo within the Clan is established through the traditional means, the capacities, skills, and abilities of family members are far more prized than their breeding. In the Shosuro view, a tool is not properly used if it is assigned to work unsuited for it, so each individual Shosuro samurai is groomed for the type of duty that seems to fit them best.

The Shosuro and Bayushi work well in concert with each other, for neither is more suited for the other's role or place. Indeed, it seems the Shosuro revel privately in their roles they play. There are none in the empire who are nearly as good at what they do, and they cherish their unique place within the Clan, knowing their value has never faded through time and will likely never do so in the future.

The Soshi

While the Bayushi and the Shosuro have always served within the courts as two sides of a single coin, the Soshi have traditionally remained a more background influence. This is not to say they do not place value on politics and diplomacy, but rather that they see their place and role as different, less suited to the public eye. Ever since their founding by the enigmatic figure “Soshi,” who appeared beside Bayushi shortly after Shosuro’s apparent death, the Soshi have endeavored as much as possible to remain in the background, even more so than the Shosuro family.

The reasons for this are simple and pragmatic. Some of the most truly dishonorable and unethical practices and research within the Clan are conducted by the Soshi – such as their dubious meddling in Shadow, giving rise to the sinister Deceiver illusionists. Furthermore, it is the Soshi who manage the Clan’s delicate network of contacts, shugenja, and spies throughout the whole of the Empire, connecting the various interpersonal networks of key Scorpion Clan members into a great web of deceit and secrecy. This part of their duties has sometimes been described as making them “cultured thugs,” like crime-lords who send out minions and agents to

deal with enemies as required. It is also the Soshi who do the work of processing raw opium for the Clan. Thus, the Soshi remain in the background at court not because they wish to be, but because they must be.

Given these practical necessities and the geographical restrictions of the Soshi family’s lands, the family has developed a very soft touch where it regards politics. They do not host a significant court within their lands, for example, nor do many of them undergo training as courtiers. To be sure, politics is no less important to them than it is to the Bayushi and Shosuro, and if anything the Soshi’s specialized skills give them all the more reason to wish to apply their talents to the court. However, even more than the Shosuro, the Soshi operate very much in the background, seeing themselves more as advance scouts and cloaked advisors to the other Families. It is the Soshi who stand behind a Bayushi lord’s shoulder, giving carefully timed suggestions and warnings so as to better implement the Clan’s larger goals.

Notwithstanding their generally subtle approach, the Soshi have always remained an extremely valuable asset to the Scorpion Clan in its political activities. Rare is the effective Scorpion daimyo who does not have ac-



cess to a Soshi advisor. The Soshi assist the Clan in a variety of ways, but the most obvious is their shugenja school. Trained in more subtle supplications and placations of the kami than those favored by other Clans, the members of the Soshi school have a considerable knack for gleaning information by mystical means without drawing suspicion. Soshi shugenja, aware of the public reputation of their Clan, are exceptionally skilled at all the arts of misdirection and deceit, over and above even those of many of their Shosuro cousins. Over the years, the school has developed a well-refined understanding of how to deflect criticism or speculation from themselves towards other individuals. They also continue to train their notorious Deceiver illusionists, although they insist the school no longer calls on the power of Nothing to produce its peculiar effects.

In addition to their roles as priests of the kami, the Soshi have also developed several other functions within the Clan since their founding. As previously mentioned, the Soshi serve as coordinators for Scorpion information networks, and as the central processors and distributors for the Clan's opium smuggling operations. Oddly, they also staff a considerable number of the Clan's magistrate positions, upholding the traditions of Soshi Saibankan and policing not only their own lands but many of those elsewhere in the Clan. Of course, this ensures that the laws within Scorpion lands are upheld in a manner useful to Scorpion goals.

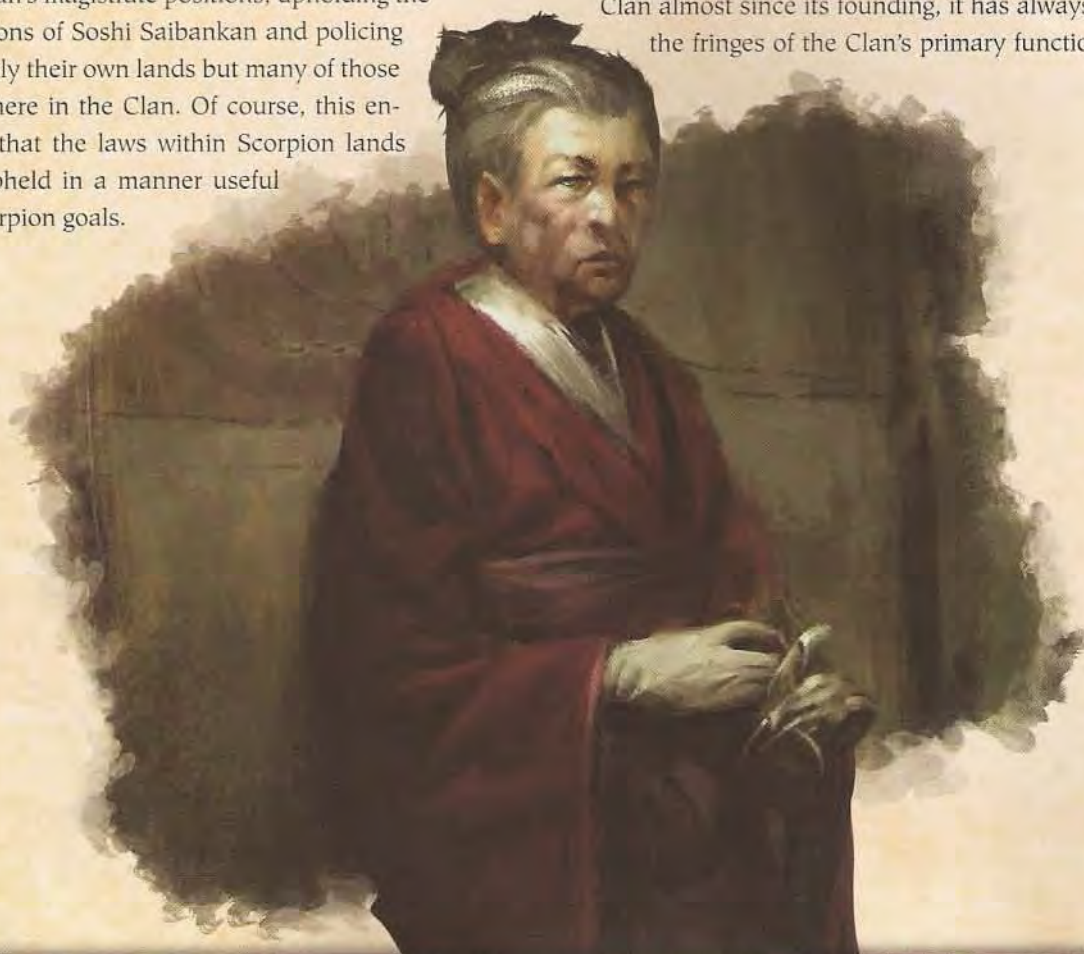
The Soshi are a family content with their role in the Clan and within the courts. Courtly politics is central to the practical application of much of their work, but they seek no accolades for it, preferring to serve as the invisible ligaments which bind the Clan together. Indeed, at no point in their history has the Soshi family proper ever sought to take a more public role within the workings of the Scorpion Clan. Scrutiny remains the one thing they fear, and they recognize their true strength as keeping to the shadows. Their cousins in the other Families, in return, have always known the value of the subtle Soshi presence. It is a quiet symbiotic relationship through which the Clan at large prospers.

The Yogo

"But, Yogo, you do not love me."

— from Yogo Anaido's "The Traitor"

Spurned and shunned in some portions of Rokugani society, misunderstood even by members of their own Clan, and feared both for their checkered history and the legends of the Yogo Curse, the Yogo family is by far the least typical of the Scorpion Families. Although the Yogo family has been an important part of the Scorpion Clan almost since its founding, it has always stood at the fringes of the Clan's primary functions. Their



behavior and mannerisms, unlike those of their brothers, are often taciturn, distant, and aloof, if not outright antagonistic. They seem to hold little to no interest in courtly intrigue and political maneuvering. It is little surprise that few outside of the Clan truly comprehend the Yogo family or its role.

If one wishes to understand the Yogo family, one must first understand its curse. The Yogo curse is as inescapable a reality for the family as the rising of the Sun in the morning. One day, each true-blooded Yogo is destined to betray the one thing they most love. This betrayal is as irrevocable as it is damaging, for whatever strings of karma were laid upon the family by the kami Fu Leng to cause the curse are ones which are not duped by the likes of mortal men. So long as they live long enough to fulfill their destinies in life, the curse will happen, and the longer it is delayed, the more devastating it will be.

Within the Scorpion courts, the Yogo function as a double-edged sword. Although they have considerable magical skills, the sins of their ancestor Yogo Junzo during the Clan War have almost irrevocably stained their reputation. Although the other Clans have never sought reparation or vengeance against the family, samurai have long memories. The Yogo were rarely trusted before, and are even less trusted now. Thus it is little surprise that the Yogo rarely involve themselves in courtly politics if they can avoid it. They believe they often do their Clan more harm than good in such a place.

The focal service of the Yogo family within the Scorpion, instead, is often one of defense, both against the Clan's enemies and against the forces of Jigoku. The skills of the Yogo Ward Masters, while originally designed for dealing with dark magics, are also a useful asset in the preparation and sealing of key documents, as well as guarding important locations from unwanted scrutiny. Yogo shugenja, and especially the virtually unknown and dreaded Kuroiban, are trained in the arts of investigation and law just as much as they are in the study of maho and the dark arts. More recently, the commercial consortium established by Yogo Ichiba has added another valued asset to the Clan.

However, even if one takes all of these capacities into account, the simple reality remains that the Yogo view the courts as a distraction from their true callings. Politics is something which takes them away from their

mystical research and exposes them to temptations which may cause their curse to inflict irreparable harm. Although court can employ the assets they possess, it uses them in ways that are not always the most effective or efficient. The Yogo thus prefer to remain in their defensive role within the Scorpion Clan, handling affairs of court more often within their own lands. To the extent that the Yogo conduct politics on their own, it is generally for the purpose of coordinating their struggle against the forces of maho with those other Clans and organizations who share the same enemy.

Though misunderstood by many and outright feared by others, the Yogo continue silently to perform their duties. Perhaps the one common thread in their family's activities is a persistent refusal to allow either their past failures or their present circumstances to weaken their spirits. Resilient and self-reliant, they remain always ready to serve their Clan in whatever fashion they are able.

The Scorpion Art of Politics

The Scorpion Clan has always played the role of villains in the Empire, performing shameful deeds and employing ruthless, dishonorable methods which others Clans, even pragmatic ones like the Crab or Mantis, would turn aside from in disgust. Naturally, these actions have earned the Clan countless enemies over the years, and the Scorpion would not have survived this long if they did not have effective political tactics for dealing with their enemies. The Scorpion have developed meticulous strategies for approaching each of the other Clans and factions of the Empire, and adapt those strategies regularly to deal with new circumstances.

THE CRAB CLAN

Crab stomped in the sand. "I can take off my shell whenever I want!"

Scorpion said, "Have you ever tried?"

Crab stopped and took his house off of his back and threw it to the ground. Scorpion smiled as they looked at each other. And Crab had nothing else to say.

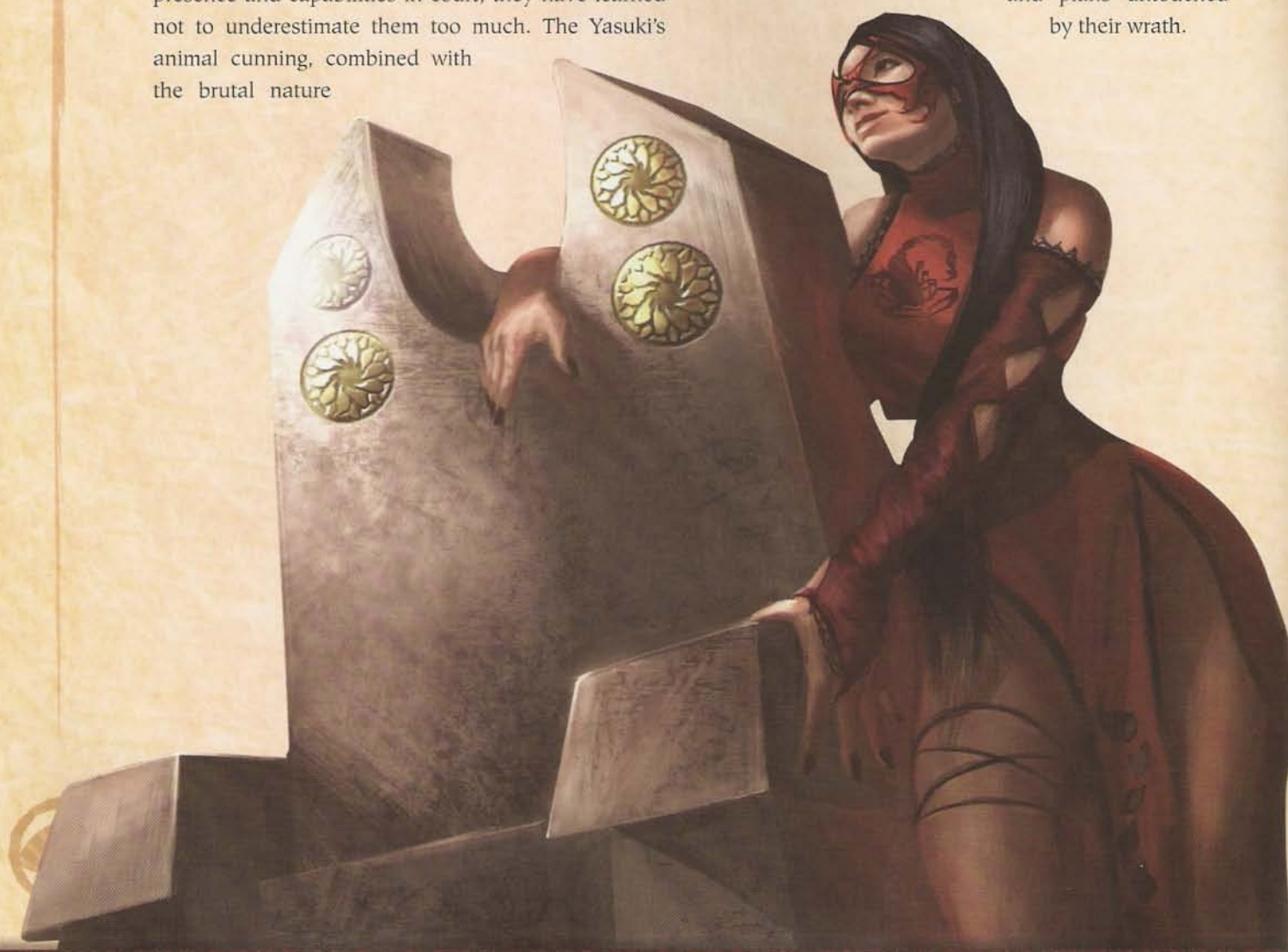
-Guwahime's Fables

A political strategy for the Crab is a more delicate matter than it might at first appear. In principle, manipulating hulking brutes with the courtly education of undeveloped newts is a simple thing for masters of subtlety and intrigue, but the implications of doing so are not so simple. When dealing with the Crab, the wiser among the Scorpion courtiers have always taken a careful and measured approach. The seething emotions present in a Clan so unrefined and combat-centered as the Crab are an easy target for the Scorpion, but they are also a problem in negotiations. Despite the consistency of their bluster, the Crab can be surprisingly impulsive and unpredictable, and the Scorpion must oftentimes force themselves to observe their opponents to the south with extreme patience before making their strike. Only by finding the true weak points of the Crab's armor, rather than merely his hot buttons, can they bring him down or place him under their thumb.

Although the Scorpion think very little of the Crab's presence and capabilities in court, they have learned not to underestimate them too much. The Yasuki's animal cunning, combined with the brutal nature

and unpredictability of the Hida, can prove a surprisingly difficult problem at times. During the last Imperial Winter Court, for example, a Scorpion instigator as experienced as Shosuro Higatsuku found himself unexpectedly outmaneuvered by Yasuki Miliko. Therefore, diversionary maneuvers and patient plotting are the mainstay of Scorpion responses to the defenders of the Wall.

The best Scorpion manipulators never let the Crab even realize the source of their misery at court. Alternatively, the martyr and the pawn can be useful tools for the Scorpion in dealing with the Crab. Crab tactics in court are almost identical to their tactics in battle – straightforward and brutal. This makes a sacrificial pawn – or, in Higatsuku's case, a martyr willing to give all for the Clan – an extremely valuable method for leading the Crab into a misstep, exposing themselves to criticism and dishonor or chasing after the wrong foe while leaving the Scorpions' more valuable assets and plans untouched by their wrath.



THE CRANE CLAN

"Ah," said the Scorpion. "But all that means is that you have nothing to gain and I have nothing to lose."

-Guwahime's Fables

One might expect the Scorpion to show a certain respect for their primary political rival among the Great Clans, but instead, there exists nothing but derision. One only has to recall Bayushi Shōju's attitudes toward Doji Hoturi to grasp why. The Crane aspire to be everything the Scorpion are not and never would wish to be, and the Scorpion hate and despise them for it. In their view, the Crane are actually hypocrites, secretly longing for every vice while publicly speaking of their purity and honor. Every Scorpion rejoices when he discovers a corrupt Crane, for such persons reaffirm that the Crane are truly not any better than the Scorpion.

Whenever and wherever the Scorpion can undermine the Crane's power-base within the courts without reducing their own strength, they will do so. The Crane approach politics as stabilizers, bolstering their power through favors, alliances, betrothals, and trade agreements, whereas the Scorpion draw strength from collusion, corruption, blackmail, dishonor, and chaos. Any time the Crane can be weakened without damaging the Scorpion, the Clan of Secrets flourishes.

The primary tactic of the Scorpion in responding to their Crane rivals is to prey on their desires, much like Yajinden exposed the Crane Clan's weakness with his infamous Bloodsword. The Crane are men and women of deep passions, driven by a powerful urge toward perfection and success. By finding these passions, Scorpion courtiers can often either create weak points or exploit existing ones more effectively, leading the Crane towards dishonor and failure. While these tactics are not as effective on the most honorable of the Crane, there are few samurai who can truly call themselves above temptation, and many Crane who thought themselves honorable have fallen to such Scorpion attentions. The specialized courtiers known as the Bayushi Tempters have found especial success against the Crane, not least because the Clan of Doji admires beauty so much.

The Scorpion ultimately believe honor is little more than a mask to conceal sinfulness, and the prettiest masks often hide the darkest of secrets. Little expense is spared in ferreting out the weaknesses and failures of the Crane Clan, especially since the Crane are a po-

litical Clan and therefore a constant threat to Scorpion power in the courts. In fact, Scorpion courtiers will often go to far more aggressive lengths in confronting and opposing Crane courtiers, if for no other reason than honing their skills and proving their superiority.

THE DRAGON CLAN

There is an ancient saying: "Much ink has been spilled on account of this subject." Within the Scorpion Clan, this saying is perhaps most accurate when discussing its political dealings with the Dragon. For much of history, the Scorpion have openly scoffed at the Dragon for hiding away in their mountains, suggesting the Clan's true motive is not enlightenment but fear. However, the Scorpion secretly admit the Dragon pose a variety of problems, not least their Kitsuki courtiers' unnerving knack for seeing through the subterfuges of the Scorpion. Although the Dragon cannot always act upon the evidence they gather, they can still respond to what they know, and this makes them surprisingly adept at holding off Scorpion ploys in court. Their skills have earned them a sort of begrudging respect from the Scorpion, and this may account in part for the recent tendency of the Scorpion to seek alliances with the Dragon Clan rather than working against them.

The unique, befuddling, and often inconsistent behavior and capacities of Dragon Clan samurai poses a further problem. There are many Dragon who go beyond mere enigma to become completely indecipherable and inscrutable. The worst of these was without question the Kami Togashi, whose peculiar gifts made him the bane of Scorpion plotting for centuries – indeed, the Scorpion Clan Champions often sought his advice rather than trying to oppose him.

When the Scorpion must oppose the Dragon in court, they generally look for a means of removing them from play. Scrutiny is the bane of a great many Scorpion plots, and if they can cause the observant Dragon to become more interested in other issues, they can operate more freely. In fact, even before their recent alliance the Scorpion would sometimes be quite helpful to the Dragon, if for no other reason than to steer their watchful eyes away from issues of greater concern.

THE LION CLAN

"In fact, if I stung you, I doubt you would even notice."

-Guwahime's Fables

The Lion are openly opposed to everything the Scorpion Clan stands for, and have always held an open animosity towards the masters of secrets. Knowing this, the Scorpion have always maintained extensive plans and contingencies for dealing with the Lion, and to this day it remains quite rare for the traditional Right Hand of the Emperor to score any kind of political victory against them. Still, the angry tenacity with which the Lion react to Scorpion court tactics requires the Clan to maintain constant vigilance. Lions may be easy to predict, but they are seldom weak or cowardly, even in the courts. What they lack in well-orchestrated spy networks, numbers of trained courtiers, or political resources they make up for in sheer determination and persistence. They fully expect villainy, deception, and conspiracy from the Scorpion, and prepare themselves to attack, as brazen as any Matsu berserker on the field of battle.

From the Scorpion viewpoint, the Lion approach is beneficial to them (although it does require careful attention and effort to exploit properly). If the Lion wish to follow a pre-conceived notion of who the Scorpion are and how they will behave in court, why disappoint them? The Scorpion freely employ small open dishonors, minor deceptions, and simple tactics against the Lion, using these political fronts to present the surface appearance the Lion expect. Meanwhile, their most talented courtiers observe the Lion for weaknesses and await the moment to strike against them effectively, with devastating precision.

The Scorpion believe the Lion are ultimately driven by doubt and fear, and they find a certain perverse enjoyment in sowing seeds of uncertainty within their souls. However, the Scorpion also never underestimate a foe, and they remain fully aware that the Lion do have some skilled and subtle courtiers. They warily observe the shrewd and quiet samurai among the Lion, looking for political masterminds behind the scenes. These men and women are the ones the Scorpion target for their more aggressive ploys, seeking to destroy their effectiveness and leave their more predictable colleagues undefended.

THE MANTIS CLAN

The Mantis are relative newcomers to the game of court, and until recently they received roughly as much attention from the Scorpion as any other Minor Clan, which

is to say virtually none. On those rare occasions when a Minor Clan had something the Scorpion wanted, the most typical response was to maneuver one of the other Great Clans into attacking them, allowing the Scorpion to extract what they needed by "saving" the victim. For less drastic situations, standard operating practices were in place for generations to respond to the particular nuances encountered in each of the Minor Clans, and those pertaining to the individual Families within the Mantis have changed little since their unification as a great Clan.

Thus, while the new Tsuruchi magistrates have significant skills, in the Scorpions' view they simply do not compare to those of the Kitsuki, and cannot offer the same threat to Scorpion goals. Despite lingering grudges over past grievances, the Scorpion typically consider the Mantis beneath notice in political intrigues.

When responding to the Yoritomo in court, the Scorpion typically treat them in a fashion similar to how they treat the Crab. The primary difference is that much of the caution which exists regarding possible backlash from unpredictable Hida is lacking in regard to the Mantis. The Scorpion tend to be quite open in their manipulations of Mantis samurai, bullying or aggressively enticing them into dishonorable actions, seeking to either remove them from effective political contention or reduce them to unwitting pawns.

With each passing decade, however, such actions have become less successful as the ever-adaptable Mantis have learned to better deal with the ways of court. Other Clans have learned not to underestimate the Mantis in court, and the accomplishments of courtiers such as Yoritomo Yoyonagi are forcing the Scorpion to begin grudgingly modifying their approach. As yet, however, the Clan has not developed a coherent new strategy for dealing with the Mantis Clan, and tends to fall back on the default strategies already in place. Until such time as the Mantis have truly made themselves at home in the Empire's courts, this is unlikely to change.

THE PHOENIX CLAN

Although the Phoenix have produced some skilled diplomats over the years, it is rare for them to interact with the Scorpion more than the minimum necessary. The two Clans have little in common interest, and the Scorpion easily outweigh the Phoenix in terms of political clout. Consequently, court negotiations between

them tend to be rather one-sided and brief. Still, there remains one element of the Phoenix Clan which always gives the Scorpion pause: their magical power.

It goes without saying that the mystical prowess of the Phoenix has always been and will always be the one thing which causes all Clans to exercise caution in dealing with them. In this the Scorpion are no different. They recognize the potential for political complications of such powerful shugenja, and the Clan has developed contingencies against their power. This is one of the rare occasions when the Yogo assume a significant role in court, for their ability to ward documents and locations can be vital in counteracting the Phoenix shugenja. The Soshi family's knack for mystical subterfuge can also be vital when dealing with the Phoenix.

When dealing with power as great as the Phoenix shugenja, too much preparation is better than not enough. In the non-spiritual domain, the Scorpion constantly seek for any moral weaknesses or past discretions among those Phoenix who oppose their policies. The Phoenix are reputed to be an honorable Clan, but just as when dealing with the Crane, the Scorpion expect to find disgraceful secrets lurking behind the appearance of purity – and they are seldom truly disappointed.

While the Scorpion do not generally think very highly of the Phoenix's presence in court, they do not despise the Phoenix in the way they do the Crane. In fact, they have often sought to curry the Phoenix Clan's favor. Better to have such powerful priests as friends rather than enemies, after all. Of course, the Scorpion do not admit to themselves any actual respect for the Phoenix, whose quest for enlightenment and spiritual purity is, in the Scorpion mind, little more than a cover for fear and ignorance.

THE SPIDER CLAN

The Spider are only just now becoming something that the Scorpion Clan recognizes as a faction of significance. The masters of secrets have, through such individuals as Daigotsu Soetsu, learned much of the interest of the Lost in the courts of Rokugan, and of their desire for an acknowledged Kami, Fu Leng. However, most Scorpion would never associate the words of this lone madman with the powerful ronin otokodate appearing in several of the Empire's unaligned territories.

What does concern the Scorpion about this new "Spider Clan," however, is the self-titled Clan's political proximity. The Spider's methods and interests are far too closely aligned with the Scorpion's own, and



the Scorpion rarely take well to such interlopers. As a result, their few encounters with those associated with the Spider movement have been unpleasant – and have generally favored the more established and experienced Scorpion.

Still, the lack of knowledge of the Spider's capabilities and goals is growing worrisome to the leadership ranks of the Scorpion Clan. As a result, Paneki has ordered the Clan to begin focusing more attention on learning about this new potential menace, ferreting out its intentions rather than confront it directly in the courts.

THE UNICORN CLAN

The Unicorn and Scorpion hold little in common, especially given the Unicorn Clan's obsession with honesty and open dealings, and the two Clans have more often than not been political opponents. Their early dealings, indeed, were often quite violent, with several wars and exchanges of territory, not to mention the occasional execution of over-bold Scorpion courtiers who were accused of "exceeding the bounds of hospitality." However, of late this has begun to subtly change. Recent generations of Scorpion had experience in the Burning Sands during their exile, and this has somewhat altered

their views of the Clan of Shinjo. A certain amount of grudging respect has begun to crop up between the Unicorn and Scorpion, due in part to this small level of shared experiences from their desert wanderings. Moreover, the rise of the more ruthless and pragmatic Moto to leadership in the Unicorn Clan has also exerted a moderating influence on their traditional hostility to the Scorpion. The Khan's march on the Imperial capital was watched with interest by the Scorpion, who carefully positioned themselves to be seen equally as either his ally or his enemy, depending on whether his dangerous gambit succeeded.

None of this, however, has erased the more than two centuries of hostility between the Clans. If open warfare has diminished in recent years, the two still often struggle with each other in the courts, and the Scorpion have developed a variety of strategies and countermeasures for dealing with the unusual behavior of Unicorn samurai and the oddly effective diplomatic skills of the Ide.

Contemporary Scorpion strategy with the Unicorn involves long and careful observation. They have discovered the Unicorn use a certain amount of their unusual, foreign-influenced behavior as a distraction, so the Scorpion concentrate on watching for the true plans and motives beneath the barbarian posturing. If the Burning Sands have taught them anything in responding to the Unicorn, it is the danger of a misstep in foreign territory. Once they have seen through the ruses to



the truth, they can plan and react appropriately. The Unicorn can be surprisingly difficult to manipulate with traditional Scorpion methods such as blackmail and seduction, and they are quick to take offense if they believe themselves lied to, so the Scorpion today prefer to rely on misdirection, half-truths, and false friendships to lead the Unicorn astray.

THE IMPERIAL FAMILIES

Although the Scorpion offer a certain grudging respect to the Otomo as their rivals for mastery of the Empire's courts, there is little love lost between the masters of secrets and the Imperial Families. The Otomo are close-minded samurai, bitterly protective of Imperial power and privilege, who dislike the amount of political power that the Crane and Scorpion wield and seek to undermine and limit it whenever possible. The Sep-pun are rigidly honorable, difficult to manipulate, and share a Lion-like instinct to distrust all Scorpions. Even the small, peaceful Miya family has often interfered in well-wrought Scorpion plans in the name of peace and diplomacy. Thus, as a general rule, the Scorpion find themselves at odds with the Imperial Families far more often than not. The reign of the late Chancellor Bayushi Kaukatsu was no exception, as he found himself in continual subtle rivalry with the Otomo family daimyo, Otomo Hoketuhime.

While social station is not a universal protection, it does provide many privileges. It is often quite difficult for the Scorpion to simply unseat or defame powerful Imperial courtiers. The stains of their sins seem to slide away with alarming ease, much like water from a high quality cloak, making defaming them a struggle. And given their propensity to stand against Scorpion interests, alliances with Imperials are rare and usually short-lived.

The Scorpion as a whole have long since concluded the most effective way to handle Imperial interference in their plots is to point the troublesome Imperials at someone else. They bow and grovel obsequiously, making every effort to appear beneath concern, while keeping their ears open for any courtiers from other Clans who could serve as targets for the Imperials' ire. When someone from another Clan makes an error or launches a plot in an Imperial court, the Scorpion always make sure these things come to the Imperials' attention.

While this tactic can be somewhat hit-or-miss, it allows the Scorpion to mitigate the overwhelming political pressure the Imperial Families can bring to bear on their enemies.

Politics: The Ways of the Scorpion

The Code of Bushido

Unlike many Clans, the Scorpion Clan Families have very few differences in their views on the code of Bushido. All Scorpions are raised from childhood to have a contemptuous view of most aspects of Bushido, and to sneer at the rest of the Empire's samurai for believing in such a childish myth. In truth, the Scorpion see Bushido as little more than a convenient way of controlling and manipulating others. Even when they do revere certain aspects of the seven virtues, they do so under their own terms, according to the peculiar ethics of their Clan. There are exceptions, of course – the Scorpion live within a world which respects and admires Bushido, and this cannot help but rub off on them to some degree. Those Scorpion who do embrace Bushido, however – the so-called “junshin” – live difficult lives indeed.

The Scorpion attitude toward honor can be baffling and infuriating to other Clans, who often make the mistake of assuming the Scorpion do not have any ethics at all. This can lead to some very unpleasant incidents when they discover what the Scorpion do believe in. A fine example of this is found in a scene from Kakita Ryoku's novel, “Winter,” in which a group of samurai debate what virtue is most important for samurai. The Scorpion guest, Bayushi Ujiro, proclaims the finest virtue to be loyalty. The other samurai present mock him with the words, “What does a Scorpion know about loyalty?” In response, Ujiro proposes a test of loyalty, asking each samurai present to give his yojimbo a command. The Scorpion goes first, turns to his bodyguard, and orders him, simply, “Kill me.” The bodyguard instantly slays Ujiro and then falls on his own sword, leaving the rest of the stunned samurai eternally shamed by this demonstration of loyalty.

Gi (Honesty): If there is one virtue for which the Scorpion feel utter contempt, it is probably Honesty. In their view, only a fool tells the truth, especially in court. In fact, the Scorpion never tire of pointing out that the samurai of other Clans lie just as readily as they do – the only difference is that the others pretend they are honorable despite their lies, while the Scorpion hold no such illusions. Indeed, the Scorpion custom of wearing masks is a part of this – in the Scorpion view, everyone wears a mask at all times, but they are the only Clan which admits it.

Yu (Courage): The Scorpion are not cowards, no matter what others might think. Their samurai are just as ready to die on command as those of any other Clan. However, they do not feel the need to constantly prove their courage or to boast of it, and sneer at Clans like the Lion who must constantly display their courage for others to see. Nor do they feel any shame in retreating from a losing fight, or employing dishonorable tactics which a Lion or Crab might condemn as “cowardly.” To the Scorpion, service to the Clan trumps all, and they are not afraid to dishonor themselves in order to fulfill their duties.

Jin (Compassion): For the Scorpion, compassion is a weakness, pure and simple. Enemies who are left alive are enemies who must be fought again, while a dead enemy, as the infamous Bayushi Tange pointed out, can never be a threat again. As for the lower castes, the Scorpion regard them as useful tools and little more. It is foolish for the other Clans to waste their resources and efforts by lavishing extra care on mere peasants.

Rei (Courtesy): The Scorpion see courtesy as a useful means of protecting themselves and controlling their enemies. It is not a virtue, in their view, but a weapon. Courtesy protects their courtiers from the wrath of “honorable” Clans like the Unicorn and Lion, and ensures they can remain quite safe so long as they follow its rules. Exploiting the rules of courtesy to their own ends, whether by hiding underneath its protection or using it to trip up their foes, is a favored Scorpion tactic.

Meyo (Honor): The Scorpion dismiss the very notion of Honor. In their view, it is merely a superstition, a quaint myth which other samurai cling to because they lack the ability to survive without it. No true Scorpion believes in Honor.

Makoto (Sincerity): The Scorpion find Sincerity, like Courtesy, to be a useful tool. Since all properly

trained Scorpions are adept liars, the ability to project sincerity in word and deed comes naturally to them, and they especially enjoy the fact that this virtue makes it so difficult to tell whether someone is lying or telling the truth. It is hardly surprising that a Scorpion became the Champion of Makoto. The intrinsic conflict between Sincerity and Honesty, in the Scorpion view, is just more proof that the code of Bushido is a nonsensical fantasy.

Chugo (Duty and Loyalty): This is the only virtue which the Scorpion truly accept and revere. All Scorpion are taught from childhood that their loyalty and obedience to the Clan must be absolute and without question. It is through their devotion to Chugo that the Scorpion can justify all their dishonorable actions, all their murders, seductions, thefts, and blackmails. Violations of loyalty are considered the one true sin of Scorpion society, and it is no coincidence that the Clan has devised a truly horrendous punishment for those who forsake Chugo: the legendary Traitor's Grove.

Tange's Lies

Late in the Second Century, Scorpion Clan Champion Bayushi Tange presented Hantei Genji with a book called, simply, *Lies*. Supposedly a treatise composed by the Emperor's command on the topic of treachery and duplicity, the book was actually a scathing attack on Akodo's *Leadership*, as well as a work urging the Emperor to adopt a ruthless, pragmatic approach to government. Needless to say, the book quickly became both famous and hugely controversial, even more so after Tange himself dropped dead in a Lion court shortly afterward... in the midst of defending his book with the words, “There is not a single lie on those pages.”

Many believe this shameful book shows the true face of the Scorpion as a Clan completely without morals. Others suggest it was nothing more than an attempted slander aimed at Akodo's great work. The Scorpion, for their part, seldom speak of the book except to chuckle and imply that others place too much importance on it. How much store the Scorpion Clan truly sets in Tange's advice remains a mystery.

One of the book's central tenets is that the absolute moral stances advocated by Akodo are useless and impractical. At one point, for example, Tange asks: “If a lie were to save the Son of Heaven, and the truth doom him, I would ask the Lion what he might choose. A lie

does indeed kill someone in the world, but what if it saved the Emperor? Who would not give his life for the Son of Heaven?" Similarly, he claims that following the tenets of Bushido against an enemy who fails to do so is a profound error. "If a man has used fraud against me, I consider him a wretch and a scoundrel, and I will not adhere to rules that he ignores. I will not put myself at the disadvantage of clinging to 'morals' while he takes the advantage of free action. The world is filled with evil men, my lord. To refuse an advantage because it is 'underhanded' is not only disrespectful to those whom you protect and lead, it is also the most selfish act I can think of."

Tangen also condemns supposed virtues such as generosity and pity, arguing they are foolish and breed contempt from others. "To pause when causing my enemy pain is weakness," he says. "He would not do so for me, and if he did, I would smite him for his stupidity."

Scorpions and Honor: The Junshin

The Scorpion Clan as a whole rejects the code of Bushido almost in its entirety. In their view, Bushido is a pleasant myth which makes their foes easy to manipulate and control. The only virtue of Bushido which the Scorpion Clan truly respects is Chugo – Duty and Loyalty – for the Scorpion take pride in their absolute obedience to the needs of their Clan. A Scorpion will not hesitate to commit any crime, break any promise, destroy his own honor and reputation if that is what the Clan requires of him.

But there are exceptions. Some among the Scorpion truly believe in Bushido, and try to follow it as best they can despite their Clan's dark duties. Such beliefs seldom remain private, of course. For the Scorpion Clan is just as adept at ferreting out its own samurai's secrets as those of other Clan samurai. The Clan refers to such unfortunately honorable samurai as "junshin," a term which literally means "pure of heart" but which, among the Scorpion, means "not of the blood" – meaning, not to be trusted.

Most junshin Scorpions live out their lives in unhappy obscurity. Since the Clan does not trust them to carry out significant duties, they are as-

Lies takes it as a given that all men are base, ambitious, and treacherous, and advocates the Emperor use swift, ruthless, and cruel action to suppress such men and retain power. For example, Tangen suggests dealing with an ambitious man by killing his wife: "His life will turn to revenge and away from ambition. All his focus will be on you and not on those around him. This is how you kill an ambitious man."

Perhaps the book's most infamous passage is the one discussing "true treachery," which Tangen argues can only be committed by great men who possess cunning, strong heart, will, and determination. Such men, Tangen seems to argue, should never be allowed into positions of power, no matter how loyal they may seem to be. "More than anything," he writes, "you must fear those upon whom you have bestowed great favor, those you hold close, and capable men of courage and will. Do not fear men who are distant, or who bear you ill

signed to unimportant tasks or married off to other Clans as part of insignificant treaties. If a junshin Scorpion is foolish enough to actually try to uphold Bushido against his Clan's interests, he will usually be quietly disposed of – ending his life in an unfortunate accident, a pointless duel, or with a teacup full of poison.

There have occasionally been junshin Scorpions who managed to successfully balance their belief in Bushido with the ability to serve their Clan's interests. The most famous of these, of course, was Bayushi Yojiro, the notorious "Honest Scorpion" from the Clan War era. Thanks in large part to the friendship and protection of notable figures like Bayushi Kachiko, Yojiro was able to serve the Scorpion Clan without fatally compromising his own tortured sense of ethics, and he eventually rose to be Clan Champion after the War Against the Darkness. Although he was noted for employing classic Scorpion ruthlessness during his lengthy tenure as Clan Champion, the Clan never completely forgot his early junshin ways. Yojiro's success has offered inspiration to more recent generations of young junshin, suggesting that a compromise between the ideals of Bushido and loyal service to the Scorpion may be possible. A few of these young idealists have even developed their own technique, the so-called "Yojiro's Way."

will. The desire to rule has always been greater than the desire for revenge."

In a final irony, Tengen argues that it is easier to trust peasants than it is to trust a nobleman of the samurai caste, a view which many samurai find downright blasphemous. Peasants, he claims, only revolt because they are fearful of and alienated from their samurai rulers. Ultimately, though, a peasant only wants to eat, making him trustworthy, whereas a nobleman has higher and more sinister ambitions.

Shinriko: Little Truths

Although Bayushi Tengen's *Lies* is well-known and notorious throughout the Empire, his greatest work is unknown outside of the Bayushi family. This was his personal journal, which he entitled *Shinriko* – "Little Truths." This private work was discovered by Tengen's wife after his death, and she passed it on to their son. It has remained in the line of the Bayushi lords ever since, and many Clan Champions have added their own observations to its pages. If there can be said to be a single work which encompasses the true nature of the Scorpion Clan, it is this one.

Shinriko consists of a long series of aphorisms, succinct comments on the true nature of life, war, and politics in Rokugan, as well as suggestions on how to deal with enemies of the Scorpion. A brief sampling follows:

Cut off the right arm and the left will be wholly occupied trying to stop the flow of blood.

How easily mortals are corrupted, and how difficult it is to make them just.

Do not fear your enemies. Only a friend can betray you.

Fools forget. Make certain you do not.

Enemies you make are enemies you keep.

Enemies you threaten make armies. Enemies you destroy make graves.

Be more afraid of an army of sheep led by a wolf than an army of wolves led by a sheep.

Everyone lies. Even me.

A commander must be two men: To those he commands, he must be a saint. To his enemies, he must be a devil. The reverse is also true.

Men hold on to nothing like that they do not know.

The Art of the Insult

The key to surviving in the courts – literally and figuratively – is wit. To insult someone without wit is to show your neck to the enemy and hand him the sword with which to cut it off. Being properly and effectively insulting, however, can not only be extremely effective, but can also cause your enemy to appear either a fool or a weakling. The courtiers and politicians of the Scorpion Clan have long perfected the art of delivering devastating insults, destroying the reputations of their enemies

Life is not fair. That doesn't mean you can't win.

Always know where your sword is. Always.

The only box that can hold a secret is a coffin.

He who speaks with anger makes his anger heard, but his words forgotten.

Secrets and porcelain have one thing in common. Drop either of them, and all the world hears it.

Procrastination is the pastime of fools.

Injury is more quickly forgotten than insult.

Only a learned woman can please a learned man.

How dearly we cling to pretty deceit.

No enemy is beneath notice.

What lies behind the throne is always greater than what sits in it.

A man in love, a man in hate: both are willing to believe anything to accomplish their cause.

Always be ready to wait.

Shinsei says, "Forgive and forget." Why? So you can fool me again?

Learn lessons of the past, for what has happened is happening. What has happened, will happen. By understanding the past, you learn how to act now and how to prepare for the future.

Patience and persistence can bring down the tallest tree.

A man divided by duty has not a single leg to stand on.

If you cannot kill a man, make him impotent.

When shame falls upon you, share it with an enemy. How readily others will believe a dishonest man.

Better to have a graveyard of dead enemies than a single living one.

Need to defeat a Crane? Convince him a battle will ruffle his feathers.

Need to defeat a Lion? Study what his grandfather did.

Need to defeat a Phoenix? Make him fight.

Need to defeat a Crab? Trip him when he charges.

Need to defeat a Dragon? Make him rely on another's trust.

Need to defeat a Unicorn? Tell him the truth.

or goading them into losing face or stumbling into unwinnable duels. Although all skilled courtiers practice the skill of being effectively insulting, the Scorpion have refined it into a true art form, and teach it in their courtier schools. A successful insult is one to which its target cannot even reply, and the Scorpion observe a series of basic principles to ensure their insults are always truly effective.

Keep it personal. An effective insult must be delivered against its target alone, not against his family, his Clan, or any other figure or institution on whose behalf he can take offense.

Keep it true. An effective insult must be based on real information, rather than wild speculation or specious slander. If ammunition for an insult is not yet available, wait until it is instead of hurling obvious falsehoods. Conversely, obvious openings should not be ignored; if someone is known as greedy, insult him for that, instead of calling him ugly.

Be amusing. A truly effective insult is one which brings smiles and laughter from those who hear it. An insult that fails to amuse will be seen for what it is – a petty attempt to degrade an enemy's character. Conversely, a

funny insult will not only charm the court, it may keep them listening to see what you say next.

Do not talk to your enemy. Talking directly to the object of your insult will give him the chance to reply, which may allow him a counterattack. Instead, talk to someone else loud enough for your target to overhear – preferably, someone of higher status, so that if your enemy interrupts you, he is offending someone of superior station.

Quote the sages. A truly effective practitioner of insult will never rely on his own words, or even those of another contemporary samurai. Instead, quoting a famous book or philosopher allows someone of far greater stature to do your work for you. An insult from Shinsei is more devastating than anything you can ever compose. Further, by quoting the sages you force your target to do the same if he wishes to reply – if he cannot think of a suitable quotation to reply, you are victorious.

Skew titles. Everyone in Rokugan has a proper rank and appropriate form of address. Twisting or mis-stating these titles, such as referring to a higher-ranking samurai with “-san” or a woman you have never met as “-chan,” is a very blunt but effective insult. This form of



insult is especially favored by Scorpion who are trying to goad someone into issuing a challenge.

Be prepared for the consequences. Rokugan is a society of warriors, in which reputation and face are all-important. Pushing someone too far with gibes and insults will often result in a duel. Naturally, Scorpion courtiers who deliver truly heinous insults are always prepared with a second to back them up. Indeed, some Scorpion employ insults as a form of indirect assassination, goading opponents into duels while a deadly Bayushi or Shosuro duelist waits in the wings, ready to kill the target.

Successful Treachery

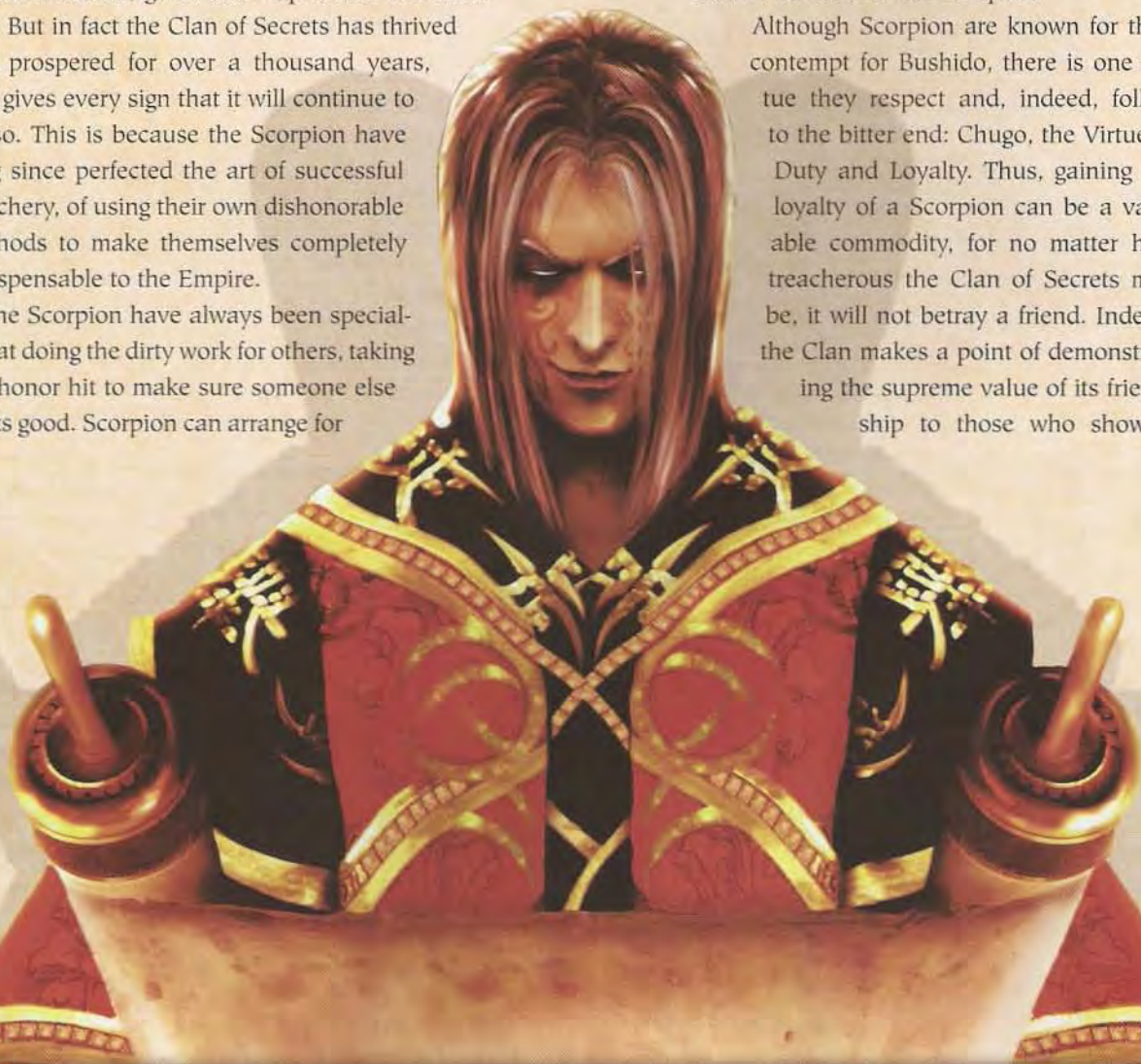
The greatest accomplishment of the Scorpion Clan throughout its history has been its ability to survive despite earning the distrust – and often, bitter enmity – of virtually every other faction in the Empire. One might expect the Scorpion to meet with nothing but defeat, if not annihilation, given their reputation and methods. But in fact the Clan of Secrets has thrived and prospered for over a thousand years, and gives every sign that it will continue to do so. This is because the Scorpion have long since perfected the art of successful treachery, of using their own dishonorable methods to make themselves completely indispensable to the Empire.

The Scorpion have always been specialists at doing the dirty work for others, taking the honor hit to make sure someone else looks good. Scorpion can arrange for

a duelist to win a vital match, for an artisan's rival to fall sick on the day of their competition, for a daimyo to marry the woman he longs for. Further, they cultivate an image as the Clan which can get things done, no matter what it takes. A samurai who faces an insoluble problem will go to the Scorpion, because he knows the Scorpion are the only ones who can help him.

For example, suppose a lord's daughter may be about to bring shame on the family by running off with the handsome Crane she loves instead of marrying the Unicorn nobleman to whom she has been betrothed. A Scorpion steps in, whispers in a few ears, and the Crane is quietly disgraced and forced to commit seppuku. The unhappy daughter is no longer tempted away from the path of honor, her new husband is happy with his respectable wife, and no one's reputation is compromised. What could have been a disaster of public disgrace, lovers' suicides, and blood feuds is instead quietly swept under the tatami mat – and the lord finds himself indebted to the Scorpion.

Although Scorpion are known for their contempt for Bushido, there is one virtue they respect and, indeed, follow to the bitter end: Chugo, the Virtue of Duty and Loyalty. Thus, gaining the loyalty of a Scorpion can be a valuable commodity, for no matter how treacherous the Clan of Secrets may be, it will not betray a friend. Indeed, the Clan makes a point of demonstrating the supreme value of its friendship to those who show it



trust or respect. In the mental world of the Scorpion, anyone who is not a friend is an enemy, so they cherish and protect their friends to the very best of their ability. A proper Scorpion will never turn on a friend unless that friend has betrayed him first. Indeed, there are some in the Empire who will admit – in private, at least – that they trust friends from the Scorpion Clan more than they do friends from honorable Clans like the Crane or the Lion.

The flip side of the value of Scorpion friendship, of course, is the bitter cost of Scorpion enmity. The Clan of Secrets has spent a thousand years teaching the samurai from the rest of the Empire how foolish and dangerous it is to insult, provoke, or harm one of its samurai. However, it does not employ brutish or over-the-top methods to maintain its fearsome aura. To the contrary, the Scorpion are characterized by patience and cunning, often waiting years or even decades to wreck subtle and indirect vengeance on their enemies. This also allows them to project a false image of weakness to lull their enemies into lowering their guard.

At the personal level, Scorpion revenge can sometimes be deceptively modest in scale, designed to slowly drain away the victim's reputation in tiny bites. For example, a Scorpion might enlist one of the Clan's notorious poison masters to humiliate an arrogant Crane with poisons that leave him stuttering or damage his complexion. A strutting Dragon duelist may be thrown off his form by metal needles in the grip of his katana, subtly changing the weight and balance of the weapon. A samurai who frequents geisha houses may suddenly find all the okaa-sans (madams) no longer welcoming his business.

As enmity deepens, Scorpion revenge can escalate into nastier forms: Planting forged travel papers that strand a samurai in hostile lands, slipping rusting compounds onto his grandfather's sword, seducing the woman he is pledged to marry, forcing his best friend to commit seppuku – these and other methods have been employed by countless Scorpions over the centuries.

At the most dramatic, lethal, all-encompassing level, the favored Scorpion revenge tactics are designed to utterly destroy their enemies. For example, trapping their enemy in a position where he must choose between two evils, each of which destroys him – choosing between exile or seppuku, for example. Another favored maneuver is to trap an enemy into choosing between a pleas-

ant lie (in which case, the Scorpion controls him) or an unpleasant truth (in which case, the victim usually commits seppuku).

The Courts of the Scorpion

The Crane may have developed Rokugan's system of politics and courts, but the Scorpion Clan has truly learned to make this world their own. Indeed, one of the most terrifying experiences in a Rokugani court is to be forced into matching wits with a Scorpion courtier. While the Crane may attempt to persuade you with great opportunities or resources, the Scorpion does not have such tools at his disposal. Instead, the Scorpion political power comes from knowledge and lack of constraint. Many a samurai has found his deepest secrets turned into bargaining chips by the ruthless and unrelenting Scorpion. Additionally, a samurai whose hands are tied by honor can rely on the Scorpion to handle the problem discreetly... for a price. Thanks to these abilities, the Scorpion thrive in Rokugan's political waters, and they design their own courts to reflect and enhance their shadowy talents. When a samurai steps into a Crane court, he knows he is at a disadvantage, but it is one which can be overcome with skill and determination. When that same samurai steps through the doors of a Scorpion court, he must wonder if he will ever see the light of the Sun again.

The Emerald Estates

Although the Castle of the Emerald Champion is not technically a Scorpion holding, it is quickly becoming a major seat of Scorpion political power. When Shosuro Jimen defeated Kakita Noritoshi at the Tournament of the Emerald Champion, the Scorpion Clan immediately set out to provide full support for the new Emerald Champion. While Jimen has not had much opportunity to spend time at his newly won estates, his Scorpion cousins have quickly made themselves at home, ensuring that the castle and its courts are prepared to host the great political players from around the Empire.

Current events have conspired to assist the Scorpion in turning the Castle of the Emerald Champion into a

A Cautionary Tale: The Story of Shiba Tatsune

A tale of the terrible fate which can befall someone who breaks a samurai's trust, the story of Shiba Tatsune is still recounted in the courts of Rokugan, and has been the subject of both poems and plays.

Shiba Tatsune was the handsome, arrogant son of a Phoenix Clan daimyo, and he had fallen in love with a Scorpion samurai-ko, Bayushi Naname. He wanted desperately to run away with her, but feared to tell his father the truth. Unfortunately, this meant his father found out first, and ordered his son to cruelly end the relationship. "Break her heart," he commanded, and Tatsune, still an honorable and obedient son despite his illicit passions, did as he was told. Naname, crushed, shaved her head and became a nun of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Her two younger sisters, however, swore revenge on Tatsune's father. Disguised as geisha, one of them seduced the daimyo while the other seduced his karo, his most trusted advisor. Within a short time they had the two men at each others' throats, full of anger and distrust, while their provinces fell into disorder and a Lion army invaded. By the time the Lion reached the gates of their castle, the two men could not even agree on who should lead the Phoenix army in the defense. And it was at that moment that the two sisters revealed themselves. They revealed that not only did the Lion army already know all the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the Phoenix castle, but the general commanding that army already knew all the secrets of the daimyo and his karo. "Killing us now will not preserve your secrets."

However, they offered a way out. If Shiba Tatsune went to the monastery and begged Naname's forgiveness, the Lion army would retreat and the lord's secrets would remain safe. The daimyo had no choice, and released Tatsune to visit the monastery. There, Naname told him the only way she would forgive him would be for him to marry her immediately. Tatsune agreed. When they returned to his father's castle the next day, they discovered both the daimyo and the karo had committed seppuku. Tatsune was the new daimyo... and a Scorpion would be the mother of the next daimyo.

political asset. The support of the Emerald Champion, arguably one of the most important men in the Empire, is potentially vital for any individual who seeks to become the next Emperor. The court can therefore expect a large group of courtiers soon, and the Scorpion have prepared accordingly. They have re-trained or replaced the castle staff until they are prepared to greet visitors with the impeccable smiling hospitality – and attentive eyes and ears – that the Scorpion pride themselves in providing. The Scorpion feel no compunctions in mining their guests for secrets in this way – after all, being a gracious host has to have some benefits.

For his own part, Shosuro Jimen finds the prospect of being in command of his own court to be entertaining at the least. The former courtier's new emerald mask hides the smile he often finds himself wearing when he thinks of the hoops he will make his petitioners jump through. Already Jimen has sent out a wave of invitations to his Emerald Magistrates, instructing them to visit the estate and give him full reports of their activities. The thought of some of the most honorable samurai from around the Empire acting on his orders provides him with no small amount of amusement.

The court of the Emerald Champion is traditionally devoted to dealing with matters of law and order in the Empire, and the attendees are usually magistrates of some kind. Members of enforcement agencies such as the Inquisitors often visit as well, seeking to better coordinate their efforts with those of the Emerald Magistrates. Of course, with Jimen and his underlings now in control of this court, it may be expected that the cooperation of the Emerald Champion's office will come with many strings attached.

Kyuden Bayushi

Rising up from atop a plateau in central Scorpion lands is one of the most resplendent and sinister castles in all of Rokugan. The palace of the Bayushi sits in state above the Scorpion lands as if it has been there since the beginning of the Empire. This, however, is one of the Clan of Secrets' many illusions. Kyuden Bayushi was burned to the ground by the Imperial Legions after the Clan was disbanded at the end of the Scorpion Clan Coup. Although the Scorpion Clan was restored after the Day of Thunder, just a few years later they were exiled to the Burning Sands, and this badly delayed the proper rebuilding of the castle. Once they returned, however,

the Scorpion quickly completed the reconstruction of their ancestral seat, restoring it to exactly the way it was before the Coup. Kyuden Bayushi today looks just like the previous castle which stood for a thousand years. This remarkable feat was carried out to remind the Empire that the Scorpion can never truly be defeated, no matter what outward appearances may show.

Kyuden Bayushi is actually an extremely comfortable palace, and the greatest possible care is given to providing fine hospitality for its guests. Servants are extremely attentive to any visiting samurai. Custom demands that they bathe newcomers on arrival to ensure they are clean and relaxed before the mental rigors of court begin. Of course, the Bayushi always know who is coming to visit their home, and servants are chosen and tasked accordingly. Samurai often let their guard down around servants, even in a Scorpion palace where they should know better. Indeed, the principle that servants know almost everything is one of the first lessons taught to young Scorpion courtiers.

Kyuden Bayushi is not outwardly a heavily fortified castle, but it is nevertheless a difficult place to reach. A visitor's first encounter when approaching the palace is an unsettling one. As the road that leads up the plateau

crests the top of the rise, a traveler is met with the sight of an immense hedge maze, the so-called Bayushi Labyrinth. This maze is designed to be as disorienting as possible, and the walls shift regularly. It also contains many traps and obstacles which can be activated in the event of attack. Only the castle's house guards can successfully navigate the maze with no difficulties, but the Bayushi often allow their guests to try to find their way through the maze as a way of impressing them with the mysteries of the Scorpion.

One of the many other physical oddities of Kyuden Bayushi is that the castle has almost no interior walls save for a few load-bearing necessities. This allows the hosts to change the layout of the castle and its halls easily, moving partitions and shoji screens around to reconstruct the interior with almost no effort. Visitors have been known to go to sleep only to awaken in what seems to be a totally different part of the castle from where they were before. Needless to say, this can cause problems when attempting to reach a meeting or appointment on time, so the Bayushi often employ this trick to place a petitioner in a position of weakness – by showing up to his meeting late, he has already insulted his hosts, forcing him to curry their favor.



Another impressive feature of the home of the Bayushi is its huge gardens. Much of the area atop the plateau, indeed almost all of it not already occupied by the castle and the labyrinth, is home to a vast, sprawling series of extremely well-maintained gardens. While not as expansive or glorious as the legendary gardens of Kyuden Doji, the Bayushi gardens are still quite beautiful and impressive in their own right, and contain many shadowy recesses where private discussions can take place away from prying eyes. (Of course, in Kyuden Bayushi it is seldom the public observer one has to worry about. The hidden ear is often the greatest danger.) Spread throughout the gardens are a variety of magnificent ancestral shrines, of a quality which would make even a Kitsu proud. They are strategically placed in several of the most beautiful corners of the grounds, where guests are likely to see and visit them. However, careful inspection shows a certain pattern to these shrines. For the most part, they are dedicated to the most public and prominent Scorpions who have walked the earth. Bayushi Shoji, Bayushi Tengen, and other similar historical figures are memorialized here. Thus, while these shrines fulfill their conventional role of venerating ancestors, they also serve as a quiet public reminder that a Scorpion's proper place is in the shadows.

Those who reach too far outside of the Scorpion Clan's proper realm risk failure, betrayal, and humiliation.

The court of Kyuden Bayushi is one of the Empire's most prestigious, ranking close behind other prominent regional courts such as Kyuden Doji and Kyuden Otomo. However, it is also known as one of the most dangerous and unsettling courts in the Empire, a place where every visitor is kept constantly on edge and where strange accidents and sudden ill-health befalls those who take a wrong step. The court's smiling masked Scorpions follow all the public rules of etiquette and protocol, while constantly delivering subtle and indirect threats, keeping their visitors off-balance. Only the most capable courtiers from other Clans can thrive in this tense environment, and many guests consider their work well-done if they simply manage to survive, preserve their honor, and avoid any major errors.

The master of Kyuden Bayushi's court is of course the Clan Champion, Bayushi Paneki. As a former bushi, Paneki has had his work cut out for him taking control of the Scorpion courts, especially given the legacy of his highly capable and successful predecessors. To this end, he has relied heavily on the assistance of capable underlings such as Shosuro Maru and Bayushi Saya. As the lord of the Scorpion Clan, of course, he also



has access to the Clan's vast espionage network and its extensive knowledge of other Clans' secrets. With such tools at his disposal, Paneki has been able to take control of Kyuden Bayushi's court as effectively as any previous Scorpion Champion.

One of Paneki's many secret assets comes in the form of a returned spirit by the name of Yogo Honami. Honami resides quietly in a room deep within Kyuden Bayushi, from which she provides excellent counsel for the Master of Secrets. Honami is an uncanny judge of character, and somehow manages to know the reputation of most of the samurai in the Empire despite apparently never leaving her quarters. As an ancient and rather traditionalist spirit, she frowns on the current trend among attractive young Scorpion women of openly dressing as seductresses. Honami recalls a time when the careful, calculated exposure of the back of a samurai-ko's neck or wrist was enough to inflame most men beyond reason, and she grumbles that current fashion trends suggest how little confidence they truly have in their own skills at manipulating men.

Ryoko Owari Toshi

Few cities in the Empire are as renowned as the City of Stories, called by those of less charitable nature the City of Lies. Ryoko Owari is the Empire's largest city, although it may soon be surpassed by the burgeoning metropolis of Toshi Ranbo, the new Imperial capital. Anyone who walks through Ryoko Owari's streets knows that this city is not in the same class as the Imperial City, however. Unlike the open and well-planned cities found elsewhere in Rokugan, Ryoko Owari appears to be a squalid and overpopulated urban center. The streets are often so crowded that peasants and samurai actually bump into each other, despite Rokugan's social taboos against public touching. The buildings have been expanded over the years to accommodate this increased population, often leaning out over the streets. Between the architecture, the swaggeringly corrupt local soldiers known as the Thunder Guard, and the huge masses of population, the city definitely has an oppressive aura about it.

As the Empire's center for the growing and preparation of medicinal opium, Ryoko Owari attracts many merchants looking to procure this substance for their Clan's healers. The Crab Clan in particular runs regular trade ships up the River of Gold, braving frequent pirate

attacks, to collect this precious resource. However, if one is willing to go searching the darker alleys, it is possible to procure the narcotic for less honorable purposes. Indeed, Ryoko Owari is the central hub for Rokugan's trade in illicit opium. This is at the same time one of the worst kept secrets in the Empire, and one of the hardest facts to prove. The Scorpion are always careful to use heimen proxies to make their deals and move the drug around the Empire, and if these corrupt merchants are caught, the Scorpion simply execute them for stealing from the opium processing houses. Since the testimony of a heimen carries no weight against that of a samurai, the best a magistrate can do is convince himself of the Scorpion Clan's guilt without finding any way of proving it. At best, such a magistrate earns the enmity of those Scorpion charged with overseeing the opium trade. At worst, he suffers an unfortunate accident.

Ryoko Owari has seen rule by more Clans than any other city in the Empire. At one time or another almost every Clan has controlled the city for at least a short period of time. Each of them – except possibly the Mantis – will insist that Ryoko Owari is the most corrupt and dangerous place in the Empire. In truth, the City of Lies is always at heart a Scorpion holding. Attempting to change that is like trying to stop the Sun from rising or setting. Each time another Clan takes control of the city, it becomes a burden on them rather than an asset, and eventually falls back into Scorpion hands. Most recently, the Unicorn administered the city for several years, attempting to impose their vision of honesty and lawful order on the place. Many Unicorn magistrates' lives were lost in the effort, and the Clan found itself gaining an infamous reputation as condoning opium smugglers. When Toturi Naseru took up residence in the city during the era of the Four Winds, Imperial Chancellor Bayushi Kaukatsu showed the Unicorn just how little control over the city they truly had. An agreement to return the city to the Scorpion was reached not long after this lesson.

Recently another Clan has risen to oppose the Scorpion Clan's domination of this valuable city. Teardrop Island is part of Ryoko Owari, yet stands apart from the rest of the city: it is a small atoll resting in the center of the River of Gold, a place of splendid isolation where every sort of samurai entertainment can be found, from prestigious geisha houses to sordid opium dens in back alleys. It is also a remarkably safe place, since by long-

standing tradition all samurai visiting the island leave their weapons with a house of sword polishers at the docks. For centuries, the Scorpion Clan has dominated this precious holding regardless of who controlled the city at large. Recent developments have changed this, however, as the Mantis Clan has launched a subtle economic attack against the Clan of Secrets. Mantis agents have managed to either buy or otherwise gain control of the majority of businesses on the island, and in a remarkably short time they have become the power behind Teardrop Island. Doubtless the Scorpion will respond to this bold gambit, and the Mantis are preparing themselves for the worst.

Samurai life and politics in Ryoko Owari can have a rather odd tone. Due to the prevalence and ready availability of opium within the city, courtiers assigned here often find themselves succumbing to addiction, and the presence of so many opium users can change the tenor of court life considerably. This is quite disconcerting to more honorable samurai who occasionally visit the city. The Scorpion naturally encourage these courtiers in their vice, since this gives them considerable leverage against them, not only here but in any future court they might attend. Of course, sometimes the Scorpion themselves fall to the same addiction, especially those who live in the city long-term.

The court of Ryoko Owari is located in the city's magnificent governor's palace, a sprawling multi-leveled estate which shows a distinct gaijin influence in its design and appearance. Like many Scorpion strongholds, the previous governor's palace was burned down during the disbanding of the Clan after the Coup, and the Unicorn built a new structure whose architecture was influenced by their foreign travels. Although the Scorpion were not happy about this, after they regained control of the city they found that gaijin designs allow for the incorporation of numerous hidden passages.

Ryoko Owari's court concerns itself chiefly with matters of trade, hardly surprising given both the city's central role in the commerce of opium and its strategic location on the River of Gold, one of the Rokugan's main trade routes. Representatives of all the Clans visit the city regularly to negotiate their access to medicinal opium, as well as to protest against the steady flow of illicit opium from this place. Given the unfortunate reputation of Ryoko Owari, it should come as no surprise that most of the Clans avoid sending their best and brightest

The Memoirs of an Opium Eater

In the year 1121, a book called *Memoirs of an Opium Eater* was published in Rokugan, and quickly became a sensation in the courts. It was the private journal of a young woman named Shiba Shonagon, a courtier assigned to Ryoko Owari. Shonagon's vivid descriptions of vice and corruption among the city's samurai, including her own spiral into the pit of opium addiction, simultaneously fascinated and appalled samurai across the Empire, and made Ryoko Owari even more notorious than it was already.

The published version of the *Memoirs* contained no actual names, only shorthand nicknames, and the courts of Rokugan were abuzz for months afterward as samurai speculated on who was actually depicted in its pages. Supposedly, a handful of unexpurgated copies do exist, and circulate privately among Rokugan's elite. Of course, the value of such a book today would be limited. A few years after the *Memoirs* were published, the Scorpion Clan Coup struck, and most of the samurai in Shonagon's tale were exiled or killed. However, while the *Memoirs* no longer have much value for blackmail, they remain painfully accurate in their depiction of the strange, corrupting world of Ryoko Owari, and the spiral of moral decay which afflicts so many courtiers in that city.

to the city. However, the Unicorn Clan's Ide family still maintains a strong commercial and diplomatic presence here, and other Clans with interests in this part of the Empire, such as the Crab and Crane, also make sure they are well represented in the City of Lies.

The governor of Ryoko Owari, Shosuro Jiroko, reigns supreme within this court, offering impeccable hospitality to those who come to visit her. As the undisputed master of the opium trade (both legal and illegal), she is in control of one of the most potent economic resources in all of Rokugan, making her almost immune to the political machinations of other Clans. Combined with her support from the Clan Champion, Bayushi Paneki, and her apprenticeship with the late Bayushi Kaukatsu, this ensures that few indeed will dare to attack her po-

litically, especially since she can shut off their supplies of opium with a single word. She seeks to emulate the example of her predecessor, Bayushi Tsimaru, who governed the city when it first returned to the control of the Scorpion Clan. Tsimaru flexed his economic power against the Yasuki, cutting off their trade rights and opium supplies for six months, and this lesson was not ignored. Although the loss of trade was a financial sacrifice for him, it demonstrated his willingness to do whatever it took to control any economic negotiations and to remain supreme within his holding. Shosuro Jiroko seeks to emulate Tsimaru's successful rule, and the Mantis move into Teardrop Island has been a troubling development for her. Jiroko considers their unexpected gambit to be a black spot on her otherwise perfect record as governor, and wonders whether they would have dared to attempt such a trick against Tsimaru. She has quietly sworn not to let it stand.

Shiro no Shosuro

On the western edge of Scorpion lands, the riverine port city of Shiro Shosuro greets its guests. The Shosuro home sits on a small hill above the River of Gold, and while its size is modest, its beauty is often compared to that of Kyuden Doji – if there

are no Crane Clan samurai present. While the castle's design is unconventional, perhaps even bizarre, few visitors can claim they were not impressed by the sight of it on its hilltop. The Shosuro family makes updates to the palace every year, sometimes subtly, other times adding dramatic changes such as new towers, walls, or entire sub-estates. Thus, it is sometimes said that every generation of Shosuro nobles grow up in a different Shiro Shosuro. Notwithstanding these peculiarities, however, the samurai who have visited the palace claim that Shosuro hospitality is on par with the best the Empire can offer – as long as you don't worry too much about what might be in your tea.

One of the main features of the palace is a set of splendid gardens, rivaled only by those of Kyuden Doji and Kyuden Bayushi. However, these gardens are as different from those of the Crane as are the samurai-ko of those two Clans. While the Doji gardens are classically beautiful, those of the Shosuro are exotic and tempting. Further, the manicured topiary has a sinister

side. The Scorpion keep a sample of every poisonous plant they know within the confines of the grounds. This is no secret – they have permission from the Emerald Magis-



A Letter From the Year 1160

Supreme Son of Heaven, my greetings,

I write to you to report on my recent arrival in Ryoko Owari. As you know, the city recently returned to the rule of the Scorpion, and I rather expected the newly reclaimed city to be reminiscent of a newly conquered territory in wartime. Much as when the Lion or the Unicorn have claimed a holding from their enemies, I expected to find uneasy peasants skulking through the streets, and nervous samurai waiting for trouble with anxious sword-hands.

Imagine my surprise, then, to find a quiet and well-ordered metropolitan center. It was in fact much more calm and pleasurable than on my previous visit, when the city was under the control of the honorable Unicorn. It seems the newly appointed governor, Bayushi Tsimaru, immediately purged the more raucous elements from the city within weeks of taking control. No less than four of the so-called "fireman" criminal gangs have been brought to justice in the harshest possible manner, with public executions where all could see. I have no doubt this created a salutary effect on the city, but I have noted since my arrival that the assorted vices for which the City of Green Walls is so famous seem to be continuing just as prosperously as before. I cannot help but wonder whether Tsimaru-sama's aggressive action was some sort of public theater, a notification to the city's baser elements that the true masters had returned and they should return to their proper subservience.

But perhaps I am merely imagining this. Living in a Scorpion city can leave one prone to developing such fearsome theories.

If there is any further service you require, Son of Heaven, it shall be my supreme honor to undertake it.

Miya Shoin

trates to do so, in order to ensure that antidotes can be prepared for any who might need them. Of course, if a bloom goes missing from time to time, who is to know?

Another major attraction at Shiro Shosuro is its famous theater, the Silken Smile. This ancient and famous theater is so well-known that plays have actually been

written about what happens within its walls. Plays performed in the Silken Smile are of such excellence and so emotionally compelling that they have been known to inflame their audiences into violence or other dishonorable acts. Naturally, the Shosuro humbly apologize when such things happen, but point out that theater is, after all, designed to inspire emotion. For every act of dishonor, they counter with hundreds of unsung acts of virtue. Even the Crane cannot disagree with their traditional rivals on this, since their own theaters rely on the same evocation of emotion in order to prosper.

The courts of Shiro no Shosuro are among the subtlest and at the same time the most challenging in Scorpion lands. The Shosuro are master deceivers, and those who are invited to their courts are soon lost in a bewildering maze of deception and misdirection, a mirror-world in which they cannot even be sure if the courtier they are speaking with today is the same one they met yesterday. To add further to the confusion, the Shosuro will claim to be the only truthful samurai in the Scorpion Clan, warning visitors against trusting Scorpions from other Families. Naturally, this is a total lie, yet in the shadowy maze of the Shosuro court it is a lie which can easily be believed. Other Clans know better than to send their premier courtiers to Shiro no Shosuro – instead, they send those whose dishonor or compromise will not be a serious blow.

The current daimyo of the family, Shosuro Toson, is a harsh man. His predecessor was murdered by one of his own subordinates, and Toson's first act as daimyo was to hunt down the betrayer, Bayushi Shinzo, and exact revenge for the man he succeeded. The Scorpion Clan never forgets a betrayal, and vengeance supersedes all other goals. Due to these preoccupations, Toson has had little opportunity to supervise the court of Shiro Shosuro, and has left this duty to lower-ranking samurai in the family, such as Shosuro Atesharu.

The Shosuro Butei Academy

Located north and east of Shiro no Shosuro, the Butei Academy is where the Scorpion train their famous actors. It is located on the main road between Nihai Tower and Shiro no Shosuro, and is heavily visited by travelers. Those attending court at Shiro no Shosuro often stop over at the Academy on their way, and experience the strange nature of the surrounding settlement, the so-called Painted City.



The Butei Academy was founded in 179, as the Shosuro were beginning to emerge as a powerful family alongside the Bayushi. The Shosuro daimyo of that era, Shosuro Taysuke, was one of the so-called junshin and was privately horrified by his Clan's growing reputation as a gang of manipulators and assassins. He founded a school for the arts in the hope of proving that the Scorpion could bring art and honor to the Empire. Naturally, this new institution did not go unnoticed by the rulers of the Scorpion Clan, and the Clan Champion saw great potential in Taysuke's school. Talented shinobi sensei were secretly planted in the school, and they began privately teaching the more sinister techniques which the butei would need to serve their Clan.

When the school's first acting troupe premiered a decade later, it was a huge success, and was quickly invited to attend the courts of many other Clans. Taysuke was delighted, and many powerful samurai lords asked for their children to enroll in the Butei Academy. The Clan Champion, however, was much more impressed with the way the actors were able to easily slip through the courts they visited, and the vast amounts of information they brought back to him. Taysuke lived out his life in happiness, unaware that his school's purpose had been subverted from the start. His successor, naturally, did not share his junshin tendencies, and worked to complete the transformation of the Butei Academy into a masterful organization of spies, infiltrators, and assassins.

Today, the Butei Academy is still a famous acting school, rivaling the actors of the Kakita Artisan Acad-

emy, but its students are also taught methods of infiltration and impersonation. The most promising students also receive instruction in poison, stealth, and assassination, and are given contacts within the Scorpion spy network which help them to build up the false personas which they will use in their later espionage careers. For the vast majority of its students, of course, the Butei Academy is never anything more than a school of the arts – they are aware the school is more than it seems, but are content to ignore such unpleasantness and focus on pursuing their acting craft.

The skilled infiltrators who emerge from the Butei Academy are a matter of rumor and supposition to the rest of the Empire. There are fanciful tales of Scorpion infiltrators so skilled they could convince a doting mother to hand an entire family's welfare into their hands. These are exaggerations, but the Shosuro Actors are certainly quite skilled, and they take their Clan's sacred duty to protect the Empire extremely seriously. In their view, whatever deceptions they must perpetrate are more than justified, and they are as ready to die for the Clan as any other Scorpion.

The Painted City

Another of the Shosuro's treasures comes in the form of this unorthodox city, built as an extension of the Shosuro Butei Academy. The entire city is made up of actors in training. They each play a roll for a season, creating a false city for the benefit of unknowing visitors, then during winter the entire city is scrapped, redesigned, and re-scripted. Samurai returning from year to year encounter a totally new experience each time they arrive. Several visitors making return trips are often confused and embarrassed when they cannot locate the inn or teahouse they frequented on their last visit, and their traveling companions enjoy a good laugh when their disoriented "guide" manages to get them totally lost.

This city serves the Scorpion in two major fashions. First, it is an excellent place for hidden operatives to deliver reports for their superiors. In a city where people change from season to season, who can be sure to whom these agents are reporting? This provides a layer of separation between the leaders of the Clan and their spies, and keeps their enemies from tracing actions back to the Scorpion Clan's upper echelons. Second,

**NPC: SHOSURO CHIHIRO,
PROMISING ACTOR**

Air: 2	Earth: 2	Fire: 2	Water: 2	Void: 3
Awareness: 4			Perception: 3	

Honor: 0.5	Status: 1.0	Glory: 1.0
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SCHOOL/RANK: Shosuro Actor 1**SKILLS:** Acting (Disguise, Mimicry) 5, Artisan: Origami 1, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Deceit 3, Etiquette (Conversation, Sincerity) 4, Knives 2, Stealth 3, Storytelling (Poetry) 2, Tea Ceremony 1**ADVANTAGES:** Crafty, Luck (3), Perceived Honor (4)**DISADVANTAGES:** Overconfident

The third child of an actress and a minor courtier, Chihiro is not the sort of person who engenders much response, reaction, or notice. At a glance, his family history is little more than a few scratch marks in an Ikoma's ledger. He has only recently passed his gempukku with little fanfare, ignored by all but his closest friends, associates, and family.

But Chihiro knows he is destined for greatness. It can be seen in the way he carries himself, the bearing he has when he is performing on the stage and when he is simply walking about. He is firmly convinced that he knows the hearts of men and women alike, and can manipulate them with the ease a puppeteer does his marionettes. He is as stealthy as the night, gifted and crafty in all of the less honorable arts required by his true service to the Scorpion Clan. Even in his youth, he has studied just a little bit of everything, and there has never been a time he can remember when he was caught unprepared.

the city's ever-changing nature creates the perfect place for people to disappear. Compromised agents or enemies that must be dealt with immediately can be quietly removed from the Empire.

Aside from these few unfortunate targets, however, most samurai find that the Painted City is one of the safest places in the Empire. Aside from the actors, scores of Scorpion assassins serve as the city's silent guardians during each season. Problems are dealt with swiftly and silently, with the actors hiding the fact that any action

Chihiro believes he is the future of the Shosuro actors, and he tells himself there is no one in this world who would deny that. In truth, Chihiro does have considerable talent and promise. His father has trained him well in mimicking the behaviors and skills of the Doji courtiers, and he has proven adept at altering his appearance and voice, not to mention performing on the stage. With the proper assistance (in the form of false documents, suitable clothing, etc), he can even pose as a minor figure of another Clan for a short time.

However, what Chihiro has always lacked in the past and continues to lack today is a grasp of his limitations. He was the sort of boy who would try to fool all of his friends during class, just to prove himself superior to them and to his sensei. While he has some justifiable pride in his abilities, he often takes things too far. Only those who can put up with his airs of braggadocio are willing to be close to him, and at times their number is fewer than he would like.

Chihiro loves to be the center of attention, be it from the one specific person he is attempting to drag into his little plots or a crowd with himself on the stage. He is convinced of his great destiny, and seeks at every chance to prove his capabilities. He has taken on himself far more risky assignments than are properly fitting for a man with his level of training and skill, but through luck and talent he has succeeded so far. He does not fully comprehend how lucky he is, however, and continues forward without pause for reflection. After all, he tells himself, there are none in the Empire who could ever see through his ruses. He is the grand enigma, the epitome of the training the Shosuro Acting Academy offers, and surely he will never be defeated.

needed to be taken at all. This is, in fact, viewed as part of their training. These disappearances can be baffling and infuriating to magistrates sent to investigate them, as they struggle for scraps of truth hidden within a city that is nothing but an illusion.

The titular head of this false city changes with the season. The senior actors submit their theme ideas and script to the Shosuro daimyo each winter, hoping to be

selected for the upcoming year. Last year, the shugenja Shosuro Atesharu served as governor. This was somewhat unusual, as he is not actually a full-time member of the Butei Academy, but his script was so moving and complex that Shosuro Toson chose it without pause. Perhaps this impressive performance helped lead to his being chosen to compete in the Jade Championship, but this is only speculation at best.

Shiro no Soshi

The seat of the Soshi family is the only notable castle in their provinces, and is notoriously hard to locate – all of the roads leading to it are heavily warded with illusion magic. Like the other major Scorpion castles, it was burned and destroyed by the Imperial Legions after the Scorpion Clan Coup, but once the Scorpion were restored as a Clan it was rebuilt seemingly almost overnight. In fact, the Scorpion had already been restoring the castle covertly, behind the protection of their illusions.

The Castle of Organization is almost impossible for non-Scorpion to find, thanks to the combination of its magical protections and the natural maze formed by the mountains around it. This is exactly as the Scorpion wish, for the purposes of Shiro no Soshi are not ones which the Scorpion would wish exposed to prying eyes. The castle is home to some of the most dubious magical experiments in the Empire, including the sinister Hidden Moon Dojo. Shiro no Soshi is also where the Clan performs much of its covert opium processing, converting the raw poppies grown in Ryoko Owari into a refined drug that can be distributed throughout the Empire. These activities take place in complex underground laboratories, hidden inside the vast network of concealed tunnels that underlie the castle proper.

The court of Shiro no Soshi is not a conventionally recognizable court at all, for very few visitors are ever allowed to visit this secretive castle, and those who do are usually already deeply ensnared in the Scorpions' web. Rather, the court of Shiro no Soshi is a place where the Scorpion themselves meet, to discuss and negotiate matters pertaining to their Clan without fear of being overheard or interfered with by outsiders. Although this would seem to make for a harmonious court,

such is not the case, for subtle power struggles often rage within the ranks of the Scorpion Clan. While inter-Clan politics within the Scorpion is not quite the blood sport it is in the sinister Spider Clan, it can still be a very nasty business indeed, and the court at Shiro no Soshi has seen some of the most ruthless political machinations in the Empire.

Overseeing the court of Shiro no Soshi are the three sisters who go collectively by the name of Soshi Uidori. Because the birth of triplets is considered extremely ill-omened in the Scorpion Clan, Uidori's parents concealed the birth of their third daughter, Miroko, admitting only to the existence of twin daughters, Uidori and Yukimi. However, the sisters were appraised of the truth at an early age, and quickly made a game out of taking each others' place. When they grew up, the sisters put this to more effective use. Uidori became the family daimyo, Yukimi became the sensei at the Soshi dojo, and their sister became a doppelganger for both of them, allowing them to freely move about the Empire in each other's place. This gives them unprecedented advantages, both in the courts and elsewhere, since they can replace each other for any duty where one individual sister's talents would be more useful.

The Hidden Moon Dojo

During the centuries that the Lying Darkness infiltrated the Empire, it sank some of its deepest roots into the Shosuro family, who embraced the ways of darkness and tainted their flesh with the notorious shadow brands. After the true nature of the Darkness was exposed, the Scorpion rejected any further open use of its powers, and



when it was defeated at Oblivion's Gate the leaders of the Soshi and Shosuro Families rounded up and interrogated all those of their Families who had been touched by its power. Any who showed the slightest aberration of behavior were executed. The shugenja in charge of this operation, Soshi Kuriname, wrote all his results in a private journal, and the information in that journal was used to found the Hidden Moon Dojo.

The role of the Hidden Moon has evolved over the three and a half decades since it was founded. Originally, it was dedicated to secretly continuing the Clan's research into Nothing, seeking to tap the power of that mysterious primal force without succumbing to its control in the way the Shosuro had nearly done before. The students of the dojo carefully chosen for the indomitable will needed to resist the lure of Nothing, and the advice of Soshi Kuriname was followed carefully – he had warned that only the surface powers of Nothing could be tapped without drawing the attention of the Shadow Dragon. All members of the school were required to fake their own deaths within six months of being accepted for training. The goal was to create men and women who would be perfect spies and assassins,

loyal only to their masters, cut off from all distractions of normal life and family.

In many ways, this training and goal remains the same today. However, the methods which the Hidden Moon teaches its students have evolved somewhat. In the course of training to manipulate the Nothing, students of the Hidden Moon were taught to control the flow of blood and chi throughout their bodies, focusing it inward to maintain their own balance, and focusing it outward to attack the weaker chi of their opponents. In this way, they could manipulate other people's minds, through both illusion and mental domination. With the passage of years, and especially since the defeat of the Shadowed Tower, the Hidden Moon sensei have become convinced that they no longer need call on the power of Nothing to perform these feats. They believe they have found ways to create the same effects without calling on the Nothing, through mastery of spiritual energy, willpower, and focus. Whether this is actually true is debatable, of course, and the Scorpion Clan Champion continues to carefully monitor the Hidden Moon in case its students show any sign of succumbing to the corruption of Nothing.

**NPC: SOSHI MAKUJIRU,
SENSEI OF THE HIDDEN MOON DOJO**

Air: 6 **Earth:** 4 **Fire:** 4 **Water:** 3 **Void:** 5
Willpower: 5 **Perception:** 4

Honor: 1.7 **Status:** 5.0 **Glory:** 1.5

SCHOOL/RANK: Soshi Shugenja 3/Soshi Deceiver 3

SKILLS: Calligraphy (Scorpion Clan Cipher) 5, Courtier 4, Deceit (Lying) 5, Etiquette 3, Instruction 6, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Meditation 4, Spellcraft 5, Stealth 6

ADVANTAGES: Social Position (Sensei)

DISADVANTAGES: Driven (to prove the Hidden Moon no longer uses Nothing)

Notes: Makujiru has failed four Deceiver spell-casting rolls.

Soshi Makujiru has only held his post as sensei of the Hidden Moon for a few years. His predecessor, Yogo Tjeki, was suborned by the Shadowed Tower, and while Tjeki was not executed for his involuntary service to Bayushi Atsuki, he was no longer

considered trustworthy enough to hold the position of sensei. Makujiru, as the most prominent and successful of the school's practitioners, was appointed in his place.

Soshi Makujiru has served in the ranks of the Deceivers for over a decade, and is one of the pioneers in the school's attempts to transcend its reliance on Nothing. He personally believes that the Deceivers have succeeded, and he quietly but relentlessly promotes the school's capabilities to his superiors in the Clan. "The Scorpion are the masters of the shadows, and it is only fitting that we have mastered the talents formerly restricted to the followers of Nothing," he says. Some of the school's other sensei are not quite as confident as Makujiru, noting certain memory lapses and other disturbing symptoms among their students, but he insists they are misinterpreting. The skills of the Deceivers are demanding to master, he observes, and it is not surprising that a few students crack under the strain.

Students of the Hidden Moon serve the Clan as covert spies, court infiltrators, and deadly assassins. Their techniques and mystical, spell-like powers can produce results quite unlike anything achievable with the normal magic of the kami, and the Clan has found them to be extremely useful agents.

Toshi Aitate

Toshi Aitate was once Sekkai Yuri, a small mining community in the southern Scorpion lands, but today it is one of the most unique cities in Rokugan. After a natural disaster flooded the mine and a good portion of the city, the settlement appeared to be on the brink of extinction. In fact, the Scorpion Clan Champion at the time, Bayushi Shoji, was willing to allow this to occur in order to resettle the region. However, one of his trusted lieutenants, Bayushi Zenasaru, had another idea. The town contained many entertainment business, especially gambling dens, that catered to the hard-working miners. Zenasaru proposed that instead of allowing these to perish, they be turned into the focus of the town, a source of dishonorable entertainment for samurai and wealthy commoners from across the land. By creating a city totally devoted to the entertainment of visitors, he proposed to accomplish two goals for the Scorpion Clan. The first, and most obvious, was a source of income to bring koku into Scorpion coffers. The second was to create a base within their own lands to gather information on the Empire's less honorable samurai. Further, this permissive atmosphere would be supported by arranging for one-tenth of each business' profits to go to the office of the Emerald Champion, thereby ensuring that the rest of the Empire would not interfere in the town's activities. Shoji was so impressed with this idea that he gave control of the region to Zenasaru, whose family rules it to this very day.

Like many Scorpion holdings, Toshi Aitate suffered during the disbanding of the Clan, and was razed nearly to the ground by the vengeful Imperial Legions. However, also like many Scorpion holdings, it was quickly rebuilt once the Scorpion regained control of their lands. It was simply too profitable to do otherwise.

Today Toshi Aitate is a city almost without comparison. The only other settlement resembling it in any way is Zakyo Toshi, the corrupt den of vice which lies on unaligned lands to the south – but unlike that place, Toshi Aitate is carefully regulated and policed by the

Scorpion, and pays proper taxes to the Emperor and the Emerald Champion. Samurai who sample the city's pleasures depart with no injury save the lightening of their purses.

The gates of Toshi Aitate do not open until the Sun leaves the sky, and all visitors are immediately met by merchants who offer to sell masks to the guests, asking in return for nothing but a chop for their tax records. Masks are customarily worn by all within Toshi Aitate, both locals and guests, and it is considered impolite to question other samurai about their identity within the city. One should simply accept any name given, for to do any less would call into question the honor of the speaker. In this way the Scorpion essentially create a new face for all of their visitors, one that only has significance within the city walls. For offering this privilege and the assurance that a guest's questionable actions will never be reported to their superiors, the Clan of Secrets is handsomely rewarded – tax shipments from Toshi Aitate must often be guarded by no less than a legion of Bayushi soldiers in order to protect the vast sums from bandits.

The city rests on a hill slope, with the Governor's modest estate sitting at the zenith. Just below the estate is the most prominent building in the entire city. The Temple of Daikoku in Toshi Aitate is one of the largest in the Empire, exceeded only by those in Ryoko Owari, the Imperial capital Toshi Ranbo, and Kyuden Gotei in Mantis lands. The reason for its bulk becomes apparent once one enters the structure. The sounds of dice being rolled and tiles being clacked together blend into the voices of worshippers praying for the Fortune of Wealth's blessing on their next roll. The monks here are noted as being particularly jovial, but still perform their duties with the same devotion as monks throughout the Empire. The money they collect is sent to the Order of the Thousand Fortunes to support less prosperous temples and shrines around Rokugan.

The Road of the Fortune's Smile leads from the city's main gates to the Temple of Daikoku. Along this road lie all the city's most prominent gambling dens, sake and tea houses, and geisha houses. Inns for those who cannot leave the city when the Sun rises are found on smaller side streets, along with smaller and cheaper business establishments which cannot afford the premium space on the city's main road. Although many of these businesses, great and small, are run by local

criminal groups, all of them operate under the watchful eye of the governor, who uses these gangs as spare enforcers and informants in exchange for permitting their existence. Scorpion magistrates watch over the city carefully, making sure all profits are honestly recorded and all taxes are properly collected. Although a few ronin who refuse to pay their debts sometimes wind up dead in back alleys, Clan samurai who visit the City of the Open Hand can be assured a safe and pleasant stay.

Toshi Aitate does have a small court, presided over by the current governor, Bayushi Zenji. The court mostly deals with local and regional matters, including relations with the Daidoji Trading Council, whose headquarters at Mura Sabishii Toshi lies to the south past the lands of the Fox Clan. Yasuki merchants also visit Toshi Aitate to make deals with the Scorpion, and both Yasuki Jinn-Kuen and the mysterious ronin merchant known as Naoharu have been rumored to visit the city on a regular basis. Indeed, the city's policy of anonymity is appealing for any courtiers who wish to deal with the Scorpion without making themselves publicly known.

Yogo Shiro

Unlike the superficially welcoming castles of the Bayushi and Shosuro, the home of the Yogo family is perhaps one of the most sinister and foreboding places in the Empire. Located near the northern end of the River of Gold, it is a castle of many tall towers, tucked in beneath the sheltering peaks of the Seikitsu Mountains. The small city attached to the castle is surrounded by marshland, further discouraging visitors. However, unlike Shiro no Soshi, Yogo Shiro does not actively hide itself from outsiders, and the castle does boast a modest court.

Yogo Shiro is a major center for the Kuroiban, the Scorpion organization which hunts those who would use forbidden magic. They are quiet allies with the Kuni witch-hunters and the Asako inquisitors, and those invited to attend court at Yogo Shiro are most likely associated in some way with one or the other of those organizations. Here, far from the intense political atmosphere of the major Scorpion castles, the Yogo meet with their fellow hunters of maho to discuss their investigations and coordinate their efforts. By arranging

such meetings here, they can avoid the sort of political clashes and Clan rivalries which would make cooperation impossible in a larger court.

Of course, while Yogo Shiro is not as private and isolated as Shiro no Soshi, it is not a stranger to dark and secretive research. Consequently, the Yogo watch each other closely, and they use their courts here to keep an eye on the purity of their colleagues from the Crab and Phoenix. The painful lessons of past corruption in all three Clans have not gone unnoticed.

The current family daimyo and head of the Yogo court, Yogo Koji, is a weary servant of the Scorpion, and shows the strain of his duties. Once a spry young man and master of warding magic, he now appears to be many years older. However, he has yet to name an heir, to the growing unease of his family. Many believe that Yogo Reiko should take his place at the head of both the family and the Kurioban, but for now the Yogo family remains in an uneasy position. If Koji does not name an heir soon, a damaging internal power struggle could develop.

Notable Scorpion NPCs

The Scorpion are a heavily political Clan, and a full accounting of their notable courtiers and politicians would require a book of its own. However, it is possible to make note of their most important figures, as well as those who comprise their most promising newcomers.

BAYUSHI HISOKA

Air: 4	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 3
Awareness: 5			Perception: 4	

Honor: 1.2	Status: 3.0	Glory: 2.8
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SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Courtier 2/Scorpion Tempter 1

SKILLS: Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Political Manipulation) 5, Deceit (Seduction) 6, Etiquette (Sincerity) 4, Games: Letters 3, Games: Sadane 4, Investigation (Interrogation) 1, Kenjutsu 1, Lore: Heraldry 2, Meditation 2, Poison 3, Stealth 2, Theology 1

ADVANTAGES: Bland, Crafty, Dangerous Beauty, VIP's Tongue, Voice

DISADVANTAGES: Bitter Betrothal (Doji Hibariko), Meddler, Sworn Enemy (Doji Hibariko)

Bayushi Hisoka is a beautiful young courtier of the Scorpion Clan. His mask resembles red spider webs spread across his well-shaped cheekbones. His voice could melt the coldest of hearts with a single quiet haiku, and his eyes can pierce the heart of any maiden who meets his gaze. Just like every other Scorpion out there. In fact, despite his handsome features he is oddly unmemorable, and most people couldn't pick him out of a crowd if they had to. Although Hisoka has used that to his advantage in the past, he possesses a certain vanity over his good looks and courtly skills, and cannot help but wish he was more memorable. In recent months he has begun dying his hair in an unusual reddish-white pattern in order to make himself more noticeable.

Despite his vanity, Hisoka has no real desire save to serve the Scorpion Clan as faithfully and loyally as possible, and he sees his good looks chiefly as an asset for the Clan. He was marked from early youth as a promising courtier, and his sensei pushed him to enter the courts as soon as he passed his gempukku, in the belief that Hisoka would learn more in the field that he

ever could in a classroom. His sensei was right – Hisoka has flourished in the Scorpion courts, learning the ins and outs of politics as though he was born for them. He finds a positive delight in the treacheries and traps that await the unsuspecting in court, and has learned the art of cutting the legs out from under an opponent with a single sharp word or withering look. He has also honed a talent for luring the weak-willed, especially women dazzled by his beauty, into paths of iniquity. Indeed, in many ways, Hisoka is the current ideal of the Bayushi courtier.

Recently Hisoka was informed by his superiors that he was to marry a young Crane maiden as part of an agreement over trade and piracy on the River of Gold. Hisoka took this in stride, seeing this as only his duty, accepting it like any other order from his Clan. It took him by surprise, however, when he was approached by a quiet, demure little Crane maiden. She was pretty enough, to be sure, but something about her struck him as fundamentally wrong. Every barb he threw at the young woman was simply and modestly accepted, with the same grace and poise as an honorable samurai receiving a reprimand from her lord. Hisoka could not



provoke her into any sort of action against him, and it infuriated him. He made it his mission to find what this young woman was about – surely she had some dark secret. But to his horror, he discovered this infuriating young maiden was the very wife he had been promised to by the Clan. Disgusted and appalled, Hisoka has stayed away from her since, focusing his attention on his duties at court and inwardly, desperately hoping that something will happen to derail the arrangement before he is forced to go through with the marriage.

BAYUSHI KURUMI

Air: 3 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 2

Void: 3

Honor: 1.5

Status: 1.0

Glory: 2.0

SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Courtier 2

SKILLS: Calligraphy 3, Courtier 4, Deceit (Seduction) 4, Etiquette (Sincerity) 3, Forgery 2, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Tea Ceremony 3

ADVANTAGES: Benten's Blessing, Dangerous Beauty

DISADVANTAGES: Bad Reputation (scandalous dress), Low Pain Threshold

Bayushi Kurumi is one of the Scorpion Clan's most promising young courtiers. She

was gifted by the Fortunes with a superb example of the dark, seductive beauty for which so many Scorpion women are infamous, but perhaps in punishment, she also displayed from an early age a frail constitution and a sensitivity to pain. As a child she would often run crying to her mother over the mildest of cuts and scrapes. Thus, it was no surprise that when it came time for her to begin her education as a samurai, her parents arranged for her to enroll in the Bayushi courtier school. Given her natural gifts, it is hardly surprising that she was trained from the beginning to emphasize and exploit her appeal to men of weak minds.

Although all attractive Scorpion women who serve in the courts are expected to employ such tactics, Kurumi has positively embraced them. Already, after only a couple of years in the courts, she has managed to dishonor, blackmail, and morally compromise numerous samurai from other Clans, ranging from eager young bushi to soft-hearted middle-aged courtiers and artisans. As part of her role she has adopted a style of dress which is unusually revealing and immodest, so much so that even the older and more traditional members of the Scorpion Clan are privately shocked at it. However, contrary to what some might think, these garments are

members of the Scorpion Clan are privately shocked at it. However, contrary to what some might think, these garments are



not solely intended to lure the attentions of weak-willed men. Kurumi employs her scandalous garments as a deliberate distraction, drawing the attention of the court and keeping their eyes off of her more experienced colleagues. And of course, she also secretly enjoys the scandalized whispers her appearance attracts.

BAYUSHI PANEKI, SCORPION CLAN CHAMPION

Air: 6	Earth: 4	Fire: 5	Water: 3	Void: 4
Reflexes: 7		Agility: 7	Perception: 5	

Honor: 1.3	Status: 8.3	Glory: 9.0
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SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Bushi 4/Shosuro Shinobi 2/
Bayushi Courtier 3

SKILLS: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 6, Calligraphy (Scorpion Clan Cipher) 4, Commerce (Appraisal) 3, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 8, Deceit (Intimidation, Seduction) 6, Defense 5, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation, Sincerity) 7, Iaijutsu 6, Investigation (Interrogation, Notice) 5, Know the School: Akodo Bushi 3, Know the School: Bayushi Bushi 4, Know the School: Kakita Bushi 3, Know the School: Moto Bushi 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 7, Kyujutsu 4, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Law 3, Medicine (Wound Treatment) 3, Meditation 3, Ninja Ranged Weapons 4, Poison 5, Stealth (Ambush, Sneaking) 6, Storytelling (Oratory, Poetry) 5, Underworld 5

ADVANTAGES: Combat Reflexes, Daikoku's Blessing, Dangerous Beauty, Glib Tongue, Heartless, Higher Purpose (protect the Empire), Language (Senpet), Quick, Perceived Honor (4), Wary

DISADVANTAGES: Lost Love (Toturi Tsudao), Sworn Enemy (Hida Kisada)

Bayushi Paneki, the current Scorpion Clan Champion, first gained widespread recognition during the War of Spirits after destroying one of the Steel Chrysanthemum's armies by poisoning their food stores. For his service he was named "Defender of the Empire" by Toturi I, a title he still takes very seriously. Indeed, although Paneki is a ruthless and unhesitating killer, he has always been intensely loyal to the Empire, and this may have been one of the reasons why Bayushi Sunetra chose him as her successor to the office of Clan Champion. Another reason was doubtless his close friendship with Toturi Tsudao during the time of the Four Winds. Her death was a crushing blow to him, and since the day she sacrificed herself for the Empire, he has worn a small symbol of the

sun over his heart to represent his eternal loyalty to her. Afterward, he transferred the same loyalty to her brother Naseru, Toturi III, and Naseru's death in the Shadowlands was nearly as painful for him as the loss of Tsudao. With the throne now empty, Paneki finds himself tasked with guiding the Scorpion Clan through one of the most turbulent eras in the Empire's history.

After Paneki was named Clan Champion, he was betrothed to Toturi Miyako, the daughter of Toku. Soon after, Miyako was kidnapped by a mysterious group of bandits. Although she was rescued by a pair of Dragon Clan magistrates, the true plans and motives of the kidnappers remains unknown, and Paneki himself personally executed the last of them. Miyako's face and throat were severely injured while she was a prisoner, and Paneki has given her his own mask, promising her she can use it to cover her scars for as long as she wished.

As a former soldier, Paneki might not seem the best choice to lead the Clan of Secrets, but like all Scorpion he was taught the ways of deceit and double-talk along with the ways of the sword, and he has proven himself to be just as capable a political operative as his predecessors. Sadly, the terrible era in which he leads his Clan has forced him to constantly deal with one crisis after another. The Scorpion have been afflicted by a famine, triggered by the wrath of the Fortune Bishamon, as well as a peasant uprising led by the Mad Dragon Kokujin – the latter an especially bitter problem, since it took the life of one of Paneki's most capable underlings, Shosuro Yudoka. Paneki's rule has also been burdened with his bitter enmity with the returned Fortune of Persistence, Hida Kisada. Kisada's refusal to aid Bayushi Shoji during the Scorpion Clan Coup is a betrayal which the Scorpion still remember with anger, and his status as a returned spirit is troubling, given the cost of the War of Spirits less than two generations ago. Paneki has made several unsuccessful assassination attempts against Kisada, and more recently, he arranged to supply the evidence which drove the Crab and Crane Clans into open war.

Paneki's political leadership style is an indirect one, relying on skilled subordinates to carry out his wishes and goals. This creates the public appearance of a Clan which is leaderless, its individual agents acting according to their own goals and ambitions. In truth, however, Paneki maintains full control of the Clan's many plots and maneuvers, and nothing happens within its ranks

without his knowledge and approval. He has truly made the title of Master of Secrets his own.

BAYUSHI SAYA, ENLIGHTENED MANIPULATOR

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 4
Strength: 4

Honor: 1.7 Status: 3.0 Glory: 4.3

SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Bushi 4

KATA: Sundering Grace

SKILLS: Athletics 1, Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 5, Deceit (Lying, Seduction) 5, Defense 3, Etiquette (Sincerity) 4, Games: Go 3, Games: Shogi 3, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Kenjutsu 3, Kyujutsu 1, Meditation 3, Stealth 3, Tea Ceremony 2

ADVANTAGES: Balance, Clear Thinker, Heartless, Higher Purpose (seek Enlightenment through politics)

"It is time for a new game, I think. Perhaps the Lion and the Unicorn will prove more interesting the second time."

Bayushi Saya is not formally trained as a courtier – her natural athleticism made her an obvious choice to be educated as a bushi. However, like most Scorpion bushi, she trained in the ways of court as well as the skills of the battlefield, and during early assignments as a yojimbo she showed a knack for political manipulation and deception that rivaled that of many courtiers with many years of experience. Within two years, her superiors began assigning her to diplomatic duties on a more-or-less permanent basis, although she continued her martial studies in between her time in court. The Scorpion are a Clan which always makes the best possible use of each samurai's talents, and Saya has proven the value of this policy of flexibility. Today, Saya is far more likely to be seen in court garb, her hair carefully arranged and her sword left on a stand in her quarters, than she is to be seen on any real battlefield.

Much of Saya's talent for court derives from her childhood love of games and tricks. Even as a small girl, she enjoyed strategy games like Go and Shogi, and showed a knack for playing tricks on others. When she entered court as an adult, she quickly realized it was little more than a huge, elaborate game, and felt a sense of profound exhilaration as she understood and mastered its rules. Playing a game with the very lives of others was more fulfilling than anything else she could imagine,

even the thrill of swordsmanship. Saya positively revels in planning and executing her elaborate political strategies, in the subtle tricks and tactics of court, and in the psychological thrill of outmaneuvering, outwitting, and manipulating her opponents in court. She observed the tactics and methods of other factions in court closely, especially the Crane Clan, and while she uses different methods, she understands their methods well.

Although Saya is a loyal Scorpion and highly effective manipulator, she is not incapable of forming real friendships with others, including those outside of the Clan. One of her closest friendships is with Mirumoto Kei, who she met over a year ago. Now that the Dragon samurai-ko has been named daimyo of the Mirumoto family, however, this friendship will doubtless benefit the Scorpion Clan in tangible ways as well.

In early 1168, during the final year of Toturi III's reign, Saya experienced a profound epiphany that brought a new depth to her understanding of court. She saw that all of life was governed by patterns no different than the rules of a game – and the game can be not merely understood but actually controlled, with one who has the insight to see the patterns. For a master of the game, a single word can be enough to bring, or deny, honor or disgrace, life or death. Saya has embraced this revelation, and her skills in court have become even more formidable as a result. Today, she is one of the most potent and feared courtiers in the Scorpion Clan's political arsenal – and as a bonus, should the need arise she can fight her own duels.

SHOSURO JIMEN, EMERALD CHAMPION

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 4
Awareness: 8 Intelligence: 6 Perception: 6

Honor: 1.1 Status: 9.1 Glory: 8.4

SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Courtier 3/Poison Master 3

SKILLS: Acting 3, Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 7, Defense 4, Etiquette (Sincerity) 6, Forgery 3, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation (Interrogation) 6, Kenjutsu 2, Know the School: Doji Courtier 4, Know the School: Ide Duelist 3, Know the School: Kakita Bushi 4, Lore: Law 3, Medicine (Antidotes) 3, Poison 8, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 6, Storytelling (Oratory) 2, Tea Ceremony 2, Theology (Fortunes, Shintao) 4, Underworld 6

ADVANTAGES: Allies (Numerous), Blackmail (Numerous), Heartless, Leadership, Social Position (Emerald Champion)

DISADVANTAGES: Cruel, Lechery (1)

Notes: Jimen possesses the Emerald Mempo, a powerful nemuranai. Wearing it grants him the Rank 1 Technique of the Emerald Magistrate School, despite his complete lack of training in that School.

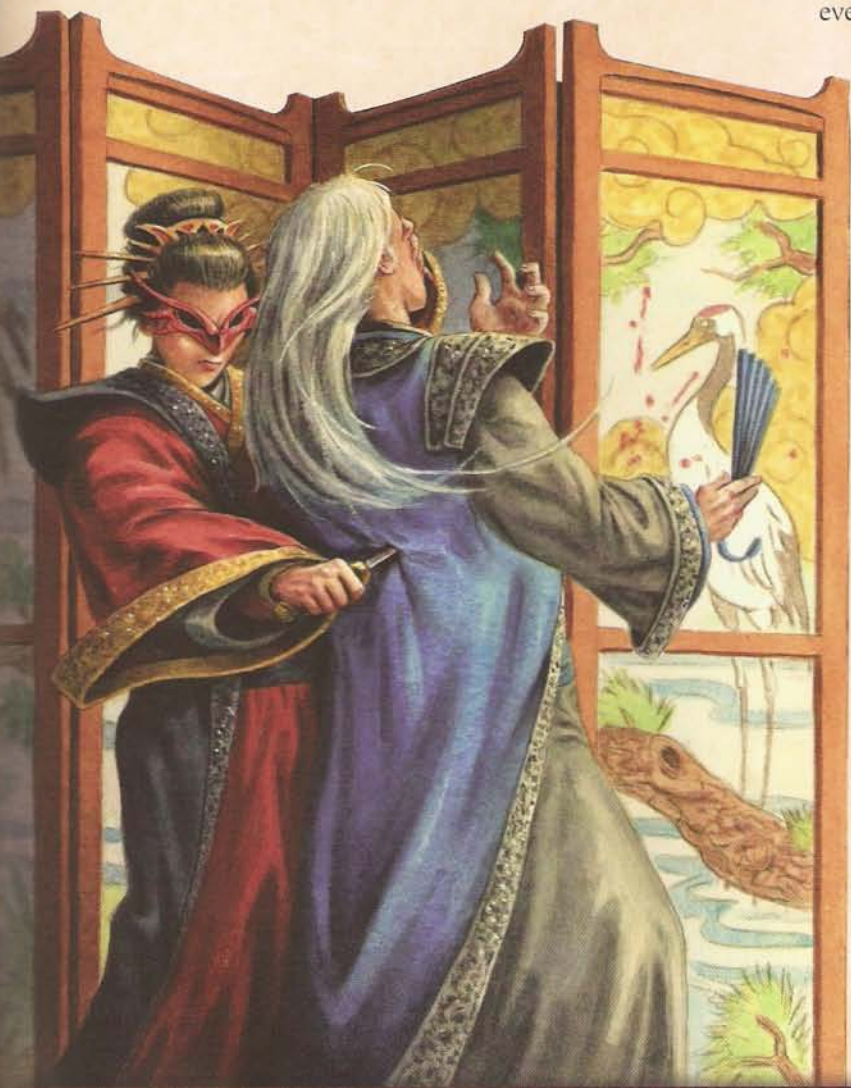
Until recently, Shosuro Jimen was a relatively unknown young diplomat of his Clan. He first came to outside attention when he was appointed to oversee the Scorpion Clan's holdings in Toshi Ranbo during Shogun Kaneka's stewardship of the throne. None outside the ranks of the Scorpion knew that he was a student of the Poison Master School, the small elite group of Shosuro who learn the arts of poison and assassination in order to supplement their other skills. Although many poison masters have been ninja, Jimen was trained as a court-

ier, employing his skills with toxins to support his quiet, subversive campaigns of blackmail, manipulation, and character assassination.

For Jimen, politics has always been an end in itself, a game which leaves him endlessly amused. Those who must deal with him often gain the impression that he does not truly care about anything higher than himself, and that he carries out his gambits and plots without regard for the needs or desires of his superiors in the Scorpion Clan. Whether this is indeed the case is difficult to say, and Clan Champion Bayushi Paneki has only said of Jimen that, "He is my most trusted representative, and he speaks with my full authority." Given Jimen's more recent activities, bold and unexpected as they have been, more than one courtier has speculated that Paneki's words may be a cover for something else, perhaps even blackmail. Jimen, should he ever hear such whispers, would only laugh.

Shosuro Jimen vaulted into the public eye when he won the Emerald Tournament in 1169. No courtier had ever before won the office of Emerald Champion, and Jimen's opponent in the final round of the tournament was none other than Kakita Noritoshi, considered the finest duelist in the Empire today. When Noritoshi conceded defeat without fighting, speculation ran rampant that some manner of sinister blackmail or threat was involved. Such gossip was, in fact, not far off the mark, for prior to the final match Jimen subtly threatened the life of Noritoshi's son.

Jimen seems to relish the controversy and rumor which swirls around his victory and his new position near the top of Rokugan's political mountain. If Kakita Noritoshi is laying schemes against him, Jimen relishes that challenge as well. Smiling behind his new Emerald Mempo, he carries on with plans for his office, recruiting new Emerald Magistrates and issuing invitations for guests to attend him at his new holding, the Castle of the Emerald Champion. If he has any weaknesses, he is skilled enough to keep them hidden from public view. What exactly he



plans to do with all his new power remains a mystery, and many in the courts are somewhat baffled by his activities, wondering more than ever whether he is truly still a loyal Scorpion.

**SHOSURO MARU, MASTER COURTIER,
CHAMPION OF MAKOTO, AND ORACLE OF
OBSIDIAN**

Air: 5 **Earth:** 4 **Fire:** 4 **Water:** 4 **Void:** 6
Intelligence: 5 Perception: 5

Honor: 1.9 **Status:** 4.0 **Glory:** 4.8

SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Courtier 5/Scorpion Tempter 1

SKILLS: Calligraphy (Scorpion Clan Cipher) 3, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 5, Deceit (Seduction) 7, Etiquette (Sincerity) 4, Investigation (Interrogation) 4, Knives 3, Meditation 3, Storytelling (Oratory) 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 3, Stealth 3, Underworld 6

ADVANTAGES: Allies (numerous, including the Obsidian Dragon), Blackmail (numerous), Chosen by the Oracles, Dangerous Beauty, Great Destiny (Oracle of Obsidian), Heartless, Social Position (Champion of Makoto)

DISADVANTAGES: Bad Reputation (seductress)

"No doubt all of you have heard stories of the Scorpion Clan. The way of the Scorpion is said to be the way of lies – but this is a lie. The way of the Scorpion Clan is the way of truth. We know the truth. We speak the truth. Others do not wish to hear the truth, and so we are villains. A clever Scorpion need not lie, for the truth can harm his enemy much more."

Soon after the coronation of Toturi III, Shosuro Maru emerged as one of the most prominent courtiers in the Scorpion Clan. Within two years of finishing her initial training at the Bayushi Courtier school, Maru's skills had become so impressive that when Bayushi Paneki needed to choose a hostess for his personal court, he selected Maru from among all the available choices, rejecting several courtiers of much greater experience. It was an inspired choice, for Maru's talents for politics and court allowed her to tend to the wishes and needs of dozens of guests, all the while keeping a perfect mental record of their every action and interaction. At courts where Maru presided, every guest was kept happy and content – and every guest's secrets, weaknesses, and flaws were ferreted out without fail. Nor did Maru shrink

from personally enticing enemy samurai into moral indiscretions. Ambassadors to Kyuden Bayushi who came to her attention quickly adopted a more pliable and cooperative attitude toward the Scorpion Clan, either through ruthless manipulation or potent physical enticement. Indeed, more than one samurai's life has been utterly destroyed by her seductive charms, and such is her talent that most of them did not even seem to notice or care how their honor had disintegrated.

As a courtier, Maru cultivated an arrogant, knowing air, suggesting that she already knew everyone's secrets, and enticing her seduction targets even more powerfully by implying that they were unworthy of her beauty. Her dark eyes seldom missed anything in court, even the smallest twitch or gesture, and she had a knack for weighting her words and looks with an implied sense of threat and violence that her targets found all the more enticing. At the same time, however, she was a true master of the arts of courtesy and sincerity, and her every word and motion seemed weighted with powerful underlying emotion. It is thus not surprising that when the challenge of the Seven Virtues took place, Maru was chosen as the Champion of Sincerity.

In the months after the death of Toturi III, however, Maru's life took a strange and unexpected turn. A new Celestial Dragon had come into existence: the Obsidian Dragon, last child of Lord Moon, the dragon of sinfulness and the counterpart to the already existing Jade Dragon. By chance, the first shugenja to encounter the Obsidian Dragon was Isawa Angai, the former Scorpion, and when the Dragon spoke of its need for an Oracle to make its power complete, Angai suggested Maru. The Dragon found the choice suitable, and soon after it approached Maru with its offer. She readily accepted.

As the new Oracle of Obsidian, Shosuro Maru has taken on a new and different role in the Empire. She still serves the Scorpion Clan, but she has her own agendas as well, ones which are very different from those of the Clan of Secrets. She has begun to travel all around the Empire, holding mysterious meetings with criminal groups, visiting samurai who struggle with sins and vices, and ferreting out obscure cults which worship the former Lord Moon. Her appearances in Scorpion courts have become infrequent and erratic, and Bayushi Paneki has been forced to find a new hostess for his courts. Paneki is aware of Maru's changed nature, and watches her carefully. He senses that her new

celestial role may soon part her from the Scorpion Clan altogether. However, while she still remembers some of her old loyalties, Paneki will not hesitate to call on her skills for the good of the Clan.

**SHOSURO EIRIASU (A.K.A. KAKITA BIKAN),
SHOSURO INFILTRATOR**

Air: 4 **Earth:** 2 **Fire:** 2 **Water:** 2 **Void:** 3
Awareness: 5

Honor: 0.8 **Status:** 1.0 (3.0 in Bikan persona) **Glory:** 2.5

SCHOOL/RANK: Shosuro Actor 3

SKILLS: Acting (Disguise, Mimicry) 7, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Deceit (Lying) 4, Etiquette (Sincerity) 3, Forgery 3, Investigation 2, Knives 3, Know the School: Kakita Artisan 3, Locksmith 2, Lore: Crane Clan 3, Meditation 3, Stealth 3, Storytelling 2, Theology 2

PERSONA SKILLS: Performance: Music 3, Performance: Song 3, Storytelling 4

ADVANTAGES: Ally (betrothed to Yasuki Miliko), Benten's Blessing, Perceived Honor (4), Read Lips, Voice

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Secret (Shosuro infiltrator)

Shosuro Eiriasu is one of many talented and capable students to emerge from the Shosuro Acting Academy over the years. Like many of the more ruthless students, he was chosen to train in the role of an infiltrator, developing a false persona in another Clan to inhabit once his skills had sufficiently matured. Eiriasu lavished especial effort on his persona, for the Clan intended to use him as a long-term agent in place rather than as a temporary spy. To this end, he developed the false identity of Kakita Bikan, a blind musician trained in the Artisan Academy. Eiriasu spent several years building up Bikan's legitimacy, making small appearances at several different courts and undertaking deep studies of the Kakita schools to ensure that his performance would be accurate. Taking on the role of a blind man was an exceptional challenge, but Eiriasu's superiors believed it was worth the risk, since few samurai would consider a blind man to be anything other than an object of compassion.

Eiriasu's opportunity to fulfill his role came when he managed to arrange an invitation for his false persona to attend the Imperial Winter Court of 1169. As a member of the Crane delegation, but a minor one with no

The Nature of an Oracle

The Oracles are vessels for the power of the Celestial Dragons, mortal avatars who are chosen to contain some portion of the dragon's power and wisdom and to employ that power within Ningen-do. The Obsidian Dragon is a new entity in the Celestial Heavens, but it is bound by the same rules as all the other Dragons, and it requires an Oracle in order to manifest its will in the mortal realm. Shosuro Maru fulfills this role perfectly.

As an Oracle, Maru can call upon the power of the Dragon at will. In game terms, this allows her to use magic as a shugenja of the same Rank as her current Insight Rank, and she is considered to have access to any spell of the four Elements as an Innate Ability (however, she cannot use Void magic). Since the Obsidian Dragon is not directly associated with any Element, she has no Affinity, but neither does she have any Deficiency.

Oracles have the power of divination and prophecy, and if someone approaches Maru in that role and with proper respect and reverence, she will answer a single question. The answer will be technically truthful, but since Maru is the Oracle of a being who supports sin and dishonor, she will tend to twist and distort her answers in ways calculated to lead her supplicants onto sinful paths.

particular talent beyond music, he was able to listen in on many of the ambassadors' private conversations, conveying vital information to the Scorpion Clan. Indeed, he was almost too successful – the Scorpions' ruthless exploitation of his information tipped off the Crane to the possibility of a spy, and Eiriasu was forced to step carefully during the second half of the season to avoid exposure. However, his usefulness to the Scorpion had not ended. Late in the winter, in an ultimately fruitless attempt to resolve the matter of the Yasuki family, a treaty arranged for a Crane-Crab marriage, and "Kakita Bikan" was chosen to be betrothed to the Crab diplomat Yasuki Miliko. With Miliko's subsequent victory in the Ruby Championship, this betrothal carries even more value for the Scorpion, though unfortunately the current Crab-Crane war has delayed the marriage.



Shosuro Eiriasu is a loyal and dedicated servant of the Scorpion Clan, a man willing to do whatever his Clan requires and to live for months or years inside of another identity. His persona as "Kakita Bikan" is an older man, kindly and soft-spoken, deliberately constructed to be as modest and self-effacing as possible. Playing the role of a blind man is a true test of Eiriasu's acting abilities, but months of obsessive practice enabled him to carry it off perfectly at Winter Court, and after dodging the various attempts to unmask him there, he feels confident he can maintain the deception as long as necessary.

New Mechanics

The following section presents new mechanical options for Scorpion characters, including new Basic and Advanced Schools, new Paths, Dojo, Advantages and Disadvantages, and Spells.

New Basic School: Shosuro Actor (Butai) (Courtier)

While the Acting Academy teaches many legitimate Noh and Kabuki actors, its deepest purpose is to train infiltrators who can serve as spies and assassins. The school teaches skills of both deception and murder, as well as the all-important method of creating and inhab-

Bayushi Nomen

In the last two years, courts across the Empire have been visited by a Scorpion diplomat called "Bayushi Nomen," a samurai who speaks for the Clan with skill and eloquence, and exploits the weaknesses of others without ever violating courtesy in any way. However, the descriptions of this person vary widely between each court where Nomen has made an appearance. Some courtiers remember a man, while others recall a woman. Some remember a bushi who carried a katana and demonstrated its use with considerable skill. Others recall a smooth-voiced courtier who bore only a wakizashi. The only common thread between these accounts, other than the name, is Nomen's distinctive mask: a silk mempo colored in white and red, covering the lower half of the face with a false smile.

In truth, there is no Bayushi Nomen. The name and mask are employed by other Scorpions who wish to operate without identifying themselves, allowing them to visit any court and do whatever the Clan requires without ever revealing their true identity. Whenever they must do some unpleasant task, they simply slip off the mask and become someone else. In order to facilitate this, the Scorpion are careful to keep the public persona of "Nomen" as honorable as possible. He (or she, as required) is always polite and soft-spoken, and never openly insults others or engages in obvious cruelty or blatant manipulation.

iting false persona. Truly skilled Shosuro Actors can put themselves into their roles so deeply that their very facial features seem to change slightly, although this is a matter of powerful self-control rather than any supernatural ability.

Benefit: +1 Awareness

Skills: Acting (Disguise), Courtier, Deceit, Etiquette (Sincerity), Knives, Meditation, Stealth.

Honor: 1.5

Outfit: Katana, wakizashi, tanto, aiguchi, 3 kimonos of varying colors, traveling pack

Techniques

RANK 1: A SCORPION HAS A THOUSAND HEARTS

A Shosuro Actor is taught to use every possible means to sway the opinions of others. You gain a bonus in rolled dice equal to your Butei School Rank to your Acting Skill Rolls and when you attempt to persuade another person using a Social Skill. Your training as an actor has also made you swift and supple, granting a bonus equal to your Air Ring to your TN to Be Hit.

RANK 2: THE SCORPION'S STING

The Shosuro family employs conventional assassins, but calls upon its actors to serve in that capacity as well. When attacking an unaware, unsuspecting, or surprised opponent, you are not limited by your Void or Skill Rank in the number of Raises you may make on your attack roll. You gain a number of Free Raises equal to your Butei School Rank on all your Knives Skill Rolls. The swift precision of your training also grants you a bonus equal your Fire Ring to your Initiative Rolls.

RANKS 3-5: THE THOUSAND MASKS

From the moment a Shosuro Actor begins training, he or she is taught to adopt the mannerisms and customs of other Clans and Families. Using correspondence and assistance from senior students all across the Empire, Actors create fictional persona and build networks of contacts in other regions. At Rank 3, you are granted 1 such functioning persona. You are given the appropriate gear for the persona (in the form of another Basic School's starting Outfit), and you may distribute 10 Ranks in Skills that aid you in your impersonation. You may acquire an Emphasis for any of these Skills at the cost of 1 Rank of Skill within the normal limit of the number of Mastery Abilities per Skill due to Skill Rank. These Skills grant Mastery Abilities, but do not count toward your Insight total for any purpose. Additional Ranks may be purchased with experience points and count as separate Ranks beginning at 1 for purposes of calculating your Insight Rank. These Skills are recorded separately from your other Skills and you may not allocate more Ranks in any Skill than your School Rank + 2. While in a persona, you may also use your core personality's Skills freely.

You gain 1 additional persona, complete with new equipment and 10 additional Skill points, at Rank 4

and again at Rank 5. If you prefer, you may instead use these additional Skill points to further develop an existing persona rather than adopt a new one. You may have multiple separate instances of the same skill. For instance, you may have Stealth at Rank 2 normally while your first persona might have Stealth at Rank 3. Mastery Level benefits for Skills are not shared across persona. You may only use the skills of your current persona and your core personality.

Changing into an established persona is as much a psychological act as a physical one. It is a form of self-hypnosis, as the Actor focuses on the persona's nature and character until it becomes his own. This requires 10 minutes of uninterrupted concentration and a successful Meditation Skill Roll against a TN of 20. An Actor can "drop out" of a persona and into his normal personality as a Simple Action.

New Advanced School: Scorpion Instigator (Courtier)

The Scorpion Instigators are the shadowy terrors of Rokugan's courts. They are both expert spies and skilled courtiers, skilled at dredging up the darkest secrets of their enemies and using them to supreme advantage. The Scorpion Instigator School is very careful to keep its existence and membership well hidden. The Empire's inability to discern who is an Instigator and who is not accounts for a good portion of the School's deadliness.

Requirements:

Rings/Traits: Awareness 5, Intelligence 5

Skills: Courtier 5, Deceit 5, Etiquette 5, Stealth 3

Advantages: Blackmail (on at least three individuals), Perceived Honor

Other: All members of the Instigators must possess the Disadvantage Dark Secret and must divulge this secret to their sensei upon joining. Recruits may bypass the need for Perceived Honor if they have 1 higher rank each in Awareness and Deceit.

Techniques

RANK 1: THE DEPTHS OF DISHONOR

To ferret out secrets that benefit the Scorpion, a true Instigator must be utterly ruthless and willing to commit the basest acts without hesitation or scruple. When making any Social Skill Roll, you may spend a Void

Dealing With Shosuro Actors in a Game

The Shosuro Actor school offers some unusual challenges to players and GMs alike. At first glance, the "Thousand Masks" technique seems over-powered, since it allows the Actor to create a perfect imitation of another Clan's samurai.

In truth, however, while an Actor's persona may be superficially flawless, it is still vulnerable to being unmasked in a variety of ways. The most obvious of these are simple errors of knowledge. An Actor who claims to be from a particular town or castle had best be deeply knowledgeable about that place, since any native – or even someone who has visited the place – may be able to catch him in errors or misstatements. Similarly, an Actor who displays skills, knowledge, or capabilities which his persona should not have is in serious danger of exposure, and had best be able to speak quickly and persuasively if he is to avoid exposure.

When Shosuro Actors are involved in a game, the GM must always be careful to play things fairly. If a player is running an Actor, the GM should play any NPCs intelligently (according to their abilities and knowledge base), and watch for errors or misstatements which might expose the player character's true nature. Similarly, if the GM is running an Actor as an adversary to the player characters, he should remember that the Actor, while skilled, is not infallible, and may well say or do something that can serve as a warning to alert characters, especially characters from the same Clan as the Actor's persona.

Point to gain a bonus in rolled dice equal to 5 - your actual Honor Rank. Also, you gain a bonus equal to your Air Ring to any Skill Roll made using a Skill required for entry into this School.

RANK 2: MASTER OF PUPPETS

Those who are weak and unworthy are nothing more than pawns to the Instigator. You may make a Contested Raw Awareness Roll against any target you choose. If successful, you gain a bonus in rolled dice to any Social Skill Roll made against that individual equal to

half the number of Disadvantage points that he possesses, rounded up. This effect lasts for the remainder of the day. This technique may only be used once per day per target.

RANK 3: SHEATH YOUR LIES IN TRUTH

An Instigator is taught to wrap his lies within the truth, using a milder form of the same self-hypnosis the Scorpion developed for the Shosuro Actors, constantly reassuring himself the lies he speaks are actually the truth. The Technique causes some mild psychological discomfort, but is extremely effective on others trying to see through his lies. By spending a Void Point, you force any attempt to determine if you are lying to require a contested Perception/Courtier Roll against your Awareness/Deceit. You gain a bonus to the total of your roll equal to 3 x your Deceit Skill Rank. If you are successful, your opponent completely believes that you are telling the truth. However, if you use this Technique to make statements that are blatantly and obviously false (such as, "The sky is red"), you will quickly gain the Disadvantage Bad Reputation (Lunatic).

Also, you gain a bonus equal to twice your Air Ring to any Skill Rolls using a Skill required for entry into this School. This replaces the benefit from Rank 1.

New Advanced School: Shosuro Poison Master

The Poison Masters are a tiny, elite element of the Scorpion Clan's legions of assassins. The group has existed for centuries but its techniques were perfected during the reign of daimyo Shosuro Hametsu, the brother of Kachiko and the first Shosuro to call himself a Poison Master. A small number of other Scorpions have followed in his footsteps, achieving further mastery of the creation, delivery, and treatment of poison. They seldom come into the public eye, although there have been exceptions -- most notably and spectacularly the infamous Shosuro Jimen, who used his talents at assassination to blackmail his way into the office of Emerald Champion.

Requirements:

Rings/Traits: Intelligence 4, Earth 3

Skills: Poison 5, Medicine (Antidotes) 3, Stealth 4

Other: Must be a member of the Scorpion Clan. You must be personally selected by the sensei of the Poison Masters.

Techniques

RANK 1: VENOM'S WISDOM

You are unusually adept at creating and using poisons, as well as at quickly and stealthily depositing them where they are needed -- whether that be in a sake cup, in a rice bowl, on a fan, or even on someone else's weapon. You gain a number of Free Raises equal to your Poison Master School Rank when using the Poison Skill. You gain a bonus equal to your Fire Ring to your Stealth and Sleight of Hand Skill Rolls. Finally, your intimate knowledge of poisons makes you more resistant to their effects — any time you are subject to the effects of poison, you gain a +1k0 bonus to any roll made to resist it.

RANK 2: VENOM'S SPEED

Your talent at planting poisons without being noticed has given you almost preternatural speed. You may take 2 Complex Actions per round as long as you do not make a physical attack or cast a spell in that round.

Also, your expertise in poisons now makes you more effective in treating them. You gain a Free Raise when using the Medicine Skill with the Antidotes Emphasis.

RANK 3: VENOM'S TRIUMPH

Your skill at deploying poisons has now advanced to the point where you gain a bonus equal to twice your Fire Ring to your Stealth and Sleight of Hand Skill Rolls, replacing the benefit from Rank 1.

Also, your poisons are now supremely deadly, and any poison which you create with the Poison Skill inflicts a -1k1 penalty to any roll made to resist its effects.

New Advanced School: Soshi Deceiver (Shugenja)

Originally created during the era when the Soshi family meddled with the sinister power of Shadow, the Deceiver school has survived and continued as a tiny, specialized, and rather controversial element within the Soshi family. The current sensei believes they are no longer calling on the power of Nothing to create their spell effects, and it is this conviction which has persuaded the Scorpion Clan to allow them to continue their peculiar practices. The school remains a hazardous one, however — whatever power the Deceivers are tapping is difficult and dangerous to control.

Requirements:

Rings/Traits: Willpower 4, Void 4

Skills: Spellcraft 4, Stealth 4

Other: Normally only Scorpion shugenja may join this School. Students of the Shosuro Shinobi School may join, but the Rank for all Ring and Skill requirements is increased by 2. Characters that were previously shugenja use their Insight Rank when determining what Deceiver School spells they may cast. Shinobi characters use only the total of their Shinobi School Rank and their Deceiver School Rank. Regardless, all members of the School must fake their own deaths and sever all social ties within six months of joining the School.

Techniques

RANK 1: SHADOWS & WIND

Students of the Deceiver School learn to create deception and falsehood with a form of specialized magic similar to the powers formerly granted by their study of the Nothing. They believe this power is no longer of Shadow, but rather is derived from their own mastery of their inner chi and their Void. However, casting these spells imposes a powerful psychological and spiritual burden on the Deceivers, and some of them have been known to slip into a form of madness brought on by failing to properly master their powers.

You lose all former Elemental Affinities and gain an Affinity for all Deceiver spells, regardless of which Element they use. You are instructed in the ways of deception, learning 3 new Deceiver spells. These spells are cast as spells of the appropriate Ring, as listed in their descriptions. You also gain a bonus in rolled dice equal to your School Rank to all Deceit and Stealth Skill Rolls.

However, any time you cast a Deceiver spell, the mental and spiritual corruption of this peculiar magic may overtake you. You must make a Willpower/Meditation Roll against a TN of $10 + (5 \times \text{Mastery Level of Spell})$. If you fail this roll, you begin to suffer from a progressive madness in which your sense of identity and memory gradually degenerates. Each failed roll makes these symptoms worse, reducing your personality and capabilities in appropriate ways chosen by the GM. After 5 failures, you will have trouble remembering your own name, and after 10 failures, you will completely lose your sense of identity, as well as the ability to cast

spells, Deceiver or otherwise. This corruption also damages your connection to the kami. If you have failed 3 or more rolls, you suffer a -5 penalty to your Spellcasting Roll when casting any normal (non-Tejina) spell. If you fail 6 or more rolls, this penalty becomes -10.

RANK 2: THE SILENT SOUL

You gain a bonus in rolled dice equal to your Deceiver School Rank on all attempts to cast with subtlety, and on any Contested Rolls made to conceal your spell casting from onlookers (see *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Third Edition* core rule book, p. 225). Your Rings are considered 1 Rank higher for the sole purpose of determining how many Deceiver spells you may cast per day.

RANK 3: AN EMPTY BREEZE

By focusing their will, Deceivers may become far more difficult to damage with conventional weapons. You may spend a Void Point to gain Carapace 4 for 1 minute. Crystal weapons and crystal-empowered spells bypass this Carapace, but no other effect can reduce it. This ability may not be used cumulatively. Each time you use this ability, you must make a Willpower/Meditation Roll to resist mental corruption as though you have cast a Rank 3 Deceiver spell.

New Path: Ichiba's Consortium (Courtier)

After the Scorpion were reinstated by Toturi I, Yogo Ichiba brought the network of merchants that he had maintained during his Clan's exile into the open, granting formal positions and patronage to his lieutenants and vassals, who had previously operated in secret. Within a short time, Ichiba sat at the head of a great web of devious and cunning merchants who also doubled as intelligence agents, all of them loyal to the Scorpion Clan alone.

Ichiba's network has survived him. The dozens of merchants who owe fealty to the Scorpion serve a dual purpose: They accrue the funds and materials that the Clan needs, and they gather information from ports of call across the Empire. It is a simple system, but an effective one.

Technique Rank: 4

Path of Entry: Any Scorpion Basic School at Rank

Requirement: Commerce 5

Path of Egress: Re-enter the same School at Rank 4

TECHNIQUE: ICHIBA'S TECHNIQUE

Yogo Ichiba was the greatest financial mastermind the Scorpion ever produced. He would have been known throughout the Empire had he not wished to remain unseen. His students share his ability and carry on his methods, ensuring they are wealthy and successful in their dealings. Each month, you gain an amount of koku equal to your Insight Rank x 5, so long as you have not left the Empire during that month. You also may spend a Void Point to re-roll any Social Skill Roll, keeping the better of the 2 rolls. You may only use this ability once per roll.

New Path: Yojiro's Way (Courtier)

Bayushi Yojiro, the "Honest Scorpion," was notorious for his oddly honorable approach to the ways of court, and was widely trusted by samurai from other Clans – indeed, it was the Lion who gave him his famous nickname. Once he became Clan Champion, Yojiro proved himself just as ruthless as any Scorpion, but his reputation as a Scorpion who made effective use of honesty and honor remains well-known throughout the Empire. Some among the Scorpion have chosen to emulate Yojiro, offering him a peculiar sort of tribute by developing a technique which relies on avoiding outright lies in favor of carefully chosen words that are always technically truthful. At present, this is a small group, and given the nature of the Scorpion Clan it is unlikely to grow much. However, the Clan has found these perversely honorable courtiers to be useful assets, since they can be employed with great effect to manipulate those who do not trust the more typical Scorpions.

Technique Rank: 2

Path of Entry: Bayushi Courtier 1 or Bayushi Bushi 1

Requirement: Must have either the "Junshin" disadvantage or an Honor Rank of 3.0 or better.

Path of Egress: Re-enter the same School at Rank 2.

TECHNIQUE: THE PATH OF TRUTH

Those Scorpions who embrace the path of honesty employ an unconventional approach to court politics, one which is seemingly at odds with the rest of their Clan's



strategies. Any time you attempt to deceive someone by omitting or avoiding the truth (rather than outright lying), you gain a bonus equal to twice your Honor Rank to the appropriate Social Skill Roll, whether it be Deceit, Courtier, or Etiquette.

New Path: Scorpion Tempter (Courtier)

Scorpion women are notorious for a dark beauty which can lead many unsuspecting samurai into the path of dishonor. Although the Clan has always exploited this to its own gain, over the years the Scorpion have also refined the art of temptation to extend far beyond mere gender or physical desire. Scorpion Tempters, men and women alike, have mastered the art of ferreting out those who suffer from any form of the Sin of Desire, and using that to manipulate, blackmail, and destroy such unfortunate persons.

Technique Rank: 2

Path of Entry: Bayushi Courtier 1, Shosuro Shinobi 1, or Shosuro Butei 1

Requirement: Must have Dangerous Beauty or Benten's Blessing

Path of Egress: Re-enter same school at one Rank higher

TECHNIQUE: PRIVATE WHISPERS

You have been taught the art of detecting others' desires and using those desires to manipulate them. After speaking for 5 minutes with someone in a social setting, you may make an Awareness/Investigation Roll against a TN equal to that person's Willpower x 5 to determine whether he specifically possesses any one of the Disadvantages related to the Sin of Desire (this would include True Love, Lost Love, Fascination, Lechery, Driven, Greedy, Spoiled, Compulsion, and any appropriate

Dark Secrets). If you Raise twice on the roll, you can ferret out the exact nature of the desire in question (for example, Compulsion: Opium). Any Deceit (Seduction) Skill Rolls you make against a target whose desires are known to you gain a +1k1 bonus.

***New Advantage: Viper's Tongue
[Granted] (Courtiers only, 3 points)***

You have a natural talent for the art of insult, witty repartee, and goading others. Your training as a courtier has honed this talent to a fine edge. Any time you attempt to insult, goad, chastise, or humiliate another person in conversation, you gain a bonus equal to your Fire Ring to any Social Skill Rolls involved (typically these would use the Courtier, Etiquette, or Deceit). You also gain a Free Raise with the Games: Sadane Skill, as your caustic wit makes you a natural talent at this court game. You must have at least 3 Ranks in Courtier Schools and/or Paths in order to take this Advantage. You cannot take Irreproachable.

***New Disadvantage:
Disturbing Countenance (2 Points)***

Something makes you highly unappealing to members of the opposite sex. You suffer a -2k0 penalty (to a minimum of 1 rolled die) to any Deceit Skill Roll made against them. Scorpion characters may take this Disadvantage for 3 points. You may not take Dangerous Beauty.

***New Disadvantage: Junshin
(3 Points, Scorpion Only)***

Junshin literally means "pure of heart," but among Scorpions, it has another meaning – "not of the blood." They use it for those of their own who are misguided enough to actually try to follow Bushido. Since the rest of Rokugan would probably consider the term a compliment, Scorpion use it in public, as a subtle way of tormenting those of their fellows who possess such naïve idealism.

You are legitimately honorable. You try your best to adhere to Bushido, but your Scorpion blood keeps dis-



agreeing with your pure heart. Your life is a difficult one – your fellow Scorpions do not completely trust you, and often assign you tasks which torment your sense of honor. Meanwhile, the rest of the Empire thinks you're just putting on another mask. While interacting with Scorpion who do not have this Disadvantage, you suffer a -2k0 penalty to any Social Skill Rolls.

New Disadvantage: Shallow (3 Points)

Perhaps it's a sarcastic tone or a twist of facial expression, but for whatever reason you cannot seem to project sincerity or honesty in conversation. No matter how hard you try, you always tend to come across as either lying or uninterested. You suffer a -5 penalty to any roll made to persuade someone or to show your own sincerity or truthfulness. Typically, this encompasses most uses of the Courtier, Etiquette, and Deceit Skills.

New Disadvantage: Yogo Curse (2 Points for Yogo Family Characters, 4 Points for other Characters)

This curse appears most frequently in the Yogo family, where many samurai still carry the cursed bloodline of Yogo himself. Although no Yogo have been allowed to marry into the other Scorpion Families, true love rarely listens to rules, and taboo often breeds tragedy. Furthermore, many Yogo have been married out of the Clan over the centuries, and the curse can thus occasionally appear almost anywhere in the Empire.

The curse is subtle but deadly: once in your life, you will betray the person, cause, or thing you love the most. Some action on your part, either intentional or unintentional, will cause that person or thing terrible harm. The more you try to avoid the curse, either by delaying it or by trying to "discharge" it on something unimportant, the more painful and complete the final betrayal will be. Ultimately, the resolution of this curse is a matter of the GM's discretion.

New Spells: Exclusive to the Soshi Deceiver Advanced School

Only students of the Soshi Deceiver Advanced School, who have mastered that School's peculiar training and techniques, can cast these spells. Using this magic is inherently damaging to the practitioner's psyche and sanity, although those of strong will can withstand the effects.

Child of Darkness

ELEMENT: Earth
MASTERY LEVEL: 5
DURATION: 1 hour
AREA OF EFFECT: Self
RANGE: Self

This spell focuses the caster's chi to enhance his physical abilities, granting him unnatural speed and power in exchange for weakening his connection to the Void. When you cast this spell, you lose the ability to spend Void Points, but yours Strength, Stamina, Reflexes, and Agility Traits are all considered to be 2 Ranks higher.

RAISES: You may Raise to increase the duration of the spell, by 30 minutes for every 2 Raises called.

Darkness' Blessing

ELEMENT: Air
MASTERY LEVEL: 3
DURATION: 1 minute
AREA OF EFFECT: Self
RANGE: Self

Casting this spell briefly gives you the form of a shadow, immaterial and intangible. This form lasts until you are attacked, or for 1 minute (whichever comes first). The first attack made against you after casting this spell automatically misses.

Darken the Veil of Sleep

ELEMENT: Air
MASTERY LEVEL: 2
DURATION: 1 hour
AREA OF EFFECT: 1 creature
RANGE: Touch

With a touch, the caster forces his chi into an already sleeping target creature, causing the target to continue sleeping in a deep sleep. The target will not awaken on its own while this spell lasts, even in the presence of loud noise or bright lights, although a physical blow that inflicts at least 1 Wound will awaken the target normally.

Darkness' Touch

ELEMENT: Fire

MASTERY LEVEL: 2

DURATION: 2 rounds

AREA OF EFFECT: 1 creature

RANGE: 30'

Much like Darken the Veil of Sleep, this spell forces the caster's chi into the target, although it does not require a physical touch to be effective. The caster's eyes fill with black shadows as this spell is cast. The target of the spell is unsettled and bewildered as his chi is disrupted, and he suffers a -1k0 penalty to all Skill Rolls for the duration of the spell.

Edge of Darkness

ELEMENT: Water

MASTERY LEVEL: 3

DURATION: 3 rounds

AREA OF EFFECT: Self

RANGE: Self

When you cast this spell, it draws in your chi, empowering your attacks to disrupt the pattern of reality in those you hit. While this spell is in effect, your attack and damage dice explode on 9's as well as 10's. Further, if the same die explodes 2 or more times, you and the target both lose 1 Void Point. Inanimate objects damaged by you while under the effects of this spell seem to melt or dissolve rather than simply break.

Embrace of Darkness

ELEMENT: Water

MASTERY LEVEL: 4

DURATION: 1 hour

AREA OF EFFECT: Self

RANGE: Self

Casting this spell focuses your chi to resist the touch of the Elements, making you resistant to normal magic and allowing you to avoid detection and notice, while slightly disconnecting you from the Celestial Order. You gain 2 Free Raises on any Stealth Skill Rolls you make, and any normal or maho spells which target you suffer a penalty to their Spellcasting Roll equal to 5 x your Deceiver School Rank. Any Deceiver spells which target you function normally. In return, you lose the ability to cast non-Deceiver spells for the duration of this spell, and you also lose the benefit of any Ancestor Advantages you may have.

False Face

ELEMENT: Air

MASTERY LEVEL: 3

DURATION: 1 hour

AREA OF EFFECT: Self

RANGE: Self

This spell creates an illusionary cloak that masks the Deceiver's voice and appearance, making him appear to be someone else. When you cast this spell, a dark, shadowy cloud boils out of the air and coalesces around you, overlaying the false appearance onto your body. Normally, this change cannot effect radical changes to your appearance, but Raises can be used to create more substantial effects.

Once the disguise is in place, suspicious viewers may make a Perception/Investigation Roll against a TN equal to your School Rank x 5 to see through the disguise. Only those who are purposely scrutinizing the character have a chance of noticing anything wrong. The illusion fades if the disguise is physically pierced in any way. Dusting the caster with salt, rice, or flour automatically shatters the illusion.

RAISES: You may Raise to increase the TN to see through the disguise, by +5 TN for each Raise called. You may also Raise to make more radical changes to your appearance, at the following rates: 1 Raise to change gender, 1 Raise to change height significantly (6" per Raise), 2 Raises to make extreme changes (change clothing into armor, different race, etc.), 3 Raises to impersonate a specific person you have seen before.

False Tongue

ELEMENT: Fire

MASTERY LEVEL: 2

DURATION: Casual concentration up to 1 hour

AREA OF EFFECT: 1 target creature

RANGE: 10'

This spell allows the Deceiver to speak aloud normally, but causes the target of the spell to hear something completely different (of the caster's choice) from what he is actually saying. For example, if you were standing in court, surrounded by several Lion and a single fellow Scorpion, you could target the Scorpion with the spell and then speak normally with the Lion while conveying different information to the Scorpion. The target being deceived hears an odd, unnatural hollowness to the caster's voice, but can still recognize it.

RAISES: The caster may Raise to extend the range of the spell, by 10' per Raise called.

Forget

ELEMENT: Air

MASTERY LEVEL: 4

DURATION: Permanent

AREA OF EFFECT: 1 target creature

RANGE: 20'

This spell allows you to remove up to 10 minutes of memory from the target. This requires you to make eye contact with the target (who must be within the spell's range) and make a Raw Willpower Roll against a TN equal to the target's Intelligence x 5. If you succeed, the target's eyes go momentarily black, and he is left briefly confused and disoriented.

During this instant you can choose to remove up to 10 minutes of memory from the target. You must have reasonably detailed knowledge of the memories you are removing, but you need not have personally experienced it. However, if you did in fact personally experience the event the memories of which you are trying to erase, you gains a Free Raise on the Raw Intelligence Roll.

Once the spell is cast successfully, the target is incapacitated for 30 seconds as his brain tries to re-organize the distorted memories. If you failed the Willpower Roll, the target feels a chilling sensation of something rummaging through his mind and memories. He is aware of what has occurred, but is still slightly disoriented. Either way, the target suffers a -1k0 penalty to all rolls for a number of rounds equal to your Air Ring.

RAISES: You may Raise to increase the length of the memory wipe, by 1 minute per Raise called.



Hidden Hand

ELEMENT: Earth
MASTERY LEVEL: 3
DURATION: 5 minutes
AREA OF EFFECT: 40'
RANGE: Self

This spell allows the Deceiver to use his hands as if he were up to 40 feet away from where he is actually standing. This means, for example, that you may reach into someone's pocket as if he were standing right beside you, or open a shoji screen from across the room. However, the spell requires you to actually move your hands as necessary to perform the action.

What you can and cannot do is thus determined exactly as if you were using your own hands. You may move an item only the distance you ordinarily could move it using only your hands, although you can move it, let it go, and then pick it up again. You may lift a weight equal to 30 pounds x your Deceiver School Rank, or shove twice that weight. For the duration of this spell, the your real hands are insubstantial and cannot hold anything.

RAISES: You may Raise to extend the range of the spell, by 10' per Raise called, to a maximum of 100 feet.

Reflection of Memory

ELEMENT: Air
MASTERY LEVEL: 1
DURATION: 10 minutes
AREA OF EFFECT: 1 creature or person
RANGE: 40'

When you cast this spell successfully, you cause the target to forget for the duration of the spell that he had seen you. The target will remember that someone was there, but his memory will draw a blank on who that was for the duration of the spell. Any attempt to figure out the discrepancy through logic, jogging the memory, etc., will utterly fail, no matter how obvious the solution should be. Once the spell expires, the target will be able to remember things normally.

Shadow Brother

ELEMENT: Earth
MASTERY LEVEL: 5
DURATION: 5 rounds



AREA OF EFFECT: 1 image

RANGE: 20'

This spell can only be cast in the presence of shadows or darkness. It allows you to effectively duplicate yourself, causing a perfect copy to spring into existence, emerging from the surrounding shadows. The double is solid and very real, possessing all of your Skills at half of your Ranks (rounded down), and possessing half of your Wound total at each Wound Rank. As a Simple Action, you may direct this double to take any action you would take, including attacking the same target you are attacking. However, it cannot speak and cannot move more than 20' from you. The Shadow Brother does not suffer any Wound penalties, but is destroyed if it is reduced to the Down or lower Wound Rank. Crystal weapons deal twice their normal amount of wounds to the Brother.

Shadow Twin

ELEMENT: Air

MASTERY LEVEL: 3

DURATION: 10 rounds

AREA OF EFFECT: 1 image

RANGE: 2'

Casting this spell allows you to project a false image of yourself, standing 2' to your left or right. The double is merely an illusion, but the strange magic of the spell allows you to switch places with you double every round as a Simple Action. Because of this, any time someone attempts to strike you in combat, there is a chance they will hit the illusion instead. In game terms, this grants you a +15 bonus to your TN to Be Hit. However, if an attacker has been attacked by you since his last turn, the bonus to your TN to Be Hit is only +5. You gain a Free Raise to all of your attacks for the duration of the spell, since your enemies are not sure whether the attack is coming from you or your double.

RAISES: You may Raise to create an additional false image, at the rate of 1 image for every 3 Raises called. Each additional image increases the caster's TN to Be Hit bonus by an additional +5.

Shosuro's Touch

ELEMENT: Earth

MASTERY LEVEL: 1

DURATION: 1 minute

AREA OF EFFECT: 1 physical object up to 4 cubic feet in size

RANGE: 10'

This spell causes 1 material object (not a living creature) to become insubstantial, forcing it to lose some of its connection to reality. The object's weight is halved and it becomes harder to grasp. If this spell targets a weapon or armor, you must make the Spellcasting Roll at a -15 penalty. Weapons affected by this spell have their DR reduced by -0k1, to a minimum of 1k1. Armor targeted by this spell suffers a -5 penalty to its TN bonus, to a minimum of 0.

Silent Step

ELEMENT: Water

MASTERY LEVEL: 3

DURATION: Instantaneous

AREA OF EFFECT: Self

RANGE: 200'

This spell allows the caster to travel through the realm of shadow, much in the way of the Goju. The use of this spell is controversial within the Deceiver School, since it seems to suggest that they are still calling on the power of Nothing. When you cast this spell, you must be standing in a shadow of your own size or larger, or a place of complete darkness. If the spell is successful, it transports you to another shadow or place of darkness within 200'. The desired location must be within your line of sight when you cast the spell.

Silent Sound

Element: Air

Mastery Level: 1

Duration: 10 minutes

Area of Effect: 1 object no more than 3' in diameter

Range: 10'

This spell is cast on a single material object. By focusing your chi on the object, you prevent it from creating any sound, including sound caused by moving it against other surfaces. For example, if this spell is cast on an arrow, the arrow will make no sound whatsoever when it is fired and flies through the air, or even when it strikes. If the spell is cast on a person's footgear, that person will gain a +1k0 bonus to Stealth Skill Rolls for the duration of the spell. Other effects may be determined by the GM's discretion.

Whispers of Nothingness

ELEMENT: Air

MASTERY LEVEL: 2

DURATION: 5 minutes per Deceiver School Rank

AREA OF EFFECT: Self

RANGE: Self

Casting this spell forces the air to gather tightly around you, muffling any sound that you make. For the duration of the spell, you gain a bonus in rolled dice to all Stealth Skill Rolls equal to your Air Ring, and the number of Raises you may call on any given Stealth Skill Roll is not limited by your Void Ring or Skill Rank.

New Dojo

The mechanics described below follow all rules and guidelines included in Chapter Eight of *The Emerald Empire*.

Hidden Moon Dojo

SCHOOL: Shosuro Shinobi, Soshi Deceiver

PATH: Shosuro Yojimbo

SCHOOL BENEFIT: You have been trained in the ways of infiltration and deception, with a special emphasis on tricking and deceiving those of high social position, who are your most frequent targets. You gain a Free Raise when using the Deceit or Acting skill to deceive someone of higher Status Rank than you.

Shosuro Acting Academy

SCHOOL: Shosuro Actor

SCHOOL BENEFIT: You have been trained as one of the finest actors in the Empire. You may add twice your Insight Rank to the total of any Acting rolls you make. This bonus does not work against characters who have identified you as an infiltrator.



MASTERS OF COURT



THE SPIDER CLAN

1170,
21st Day of the Month of the Hare

The hulking form of Hida Benjiro was strangely still as the great warrior sat at a low table. For once his armor had been put aside, and his only weapons, his *daisho*, lay on the table within reach. The warrior's brow furrowed as he consulted one scroll after another, setting them aside in a neat pile as he finished each one. He had been sitting at the table, unmoving save for the exchange of scrolls, for nearly an hour. In all that time, Yasuki Taiku had not moved or spoken. He was, in fact, too terrified to do either.

Finally, Benjiro set the last of the scrolls aside and folded his hands together, cracking his knuckles as he did so. The sound seemed deafening in the small magistrate's office that the two had commandeered for their meeting. "Impressive," Benjiro said. "Very impressive indeed."

A tiny spark of relief blossomed in Taiku's chest, but he did not allow himself to relax just yet. "Thank you, Benjiro-sama. Coming from a man of your station, such a compliment is a great honor."

"Such a compliment is the least that you deserve. If these accounts are to be believed, then you may well be the most productive and successful procurement merchants in the entire Crab Clan." He paused for a moment, glancing at the stack of scrolls. "So... are they?"

Taiku did not allow his smile to falter. "Are they? Are they what?"

"Are they to be believed?" Benjiro asked. His tone re-

mained light, conversational, but the steel in his eyes had not changed.

"Absolutely," Taiku replied instantly. The blossom of relief in his chest had been replaced by a fluttering panic that he struggled to control. "I would never falsify my reports, my lord. To do so would weaken the Crab, and I would rather die."

"A fitting attitude for any Crab," Benjiro said with a slight smile. "Perhaps, then, you might regale me with the tale of how you were able to procure almost twice as much rice as the next most successful merchant, and secure a sizeable amount of ore fit for Kaiu steel while you were at it?"

Taiku smiled wanly. "If that is your wish, my lord."

"Why would I ask otherwise?" Benjiro said.

The merchant held up a hand. "I only say that because the trafficking of goods and funds performed by men such as me is a distasteful act, a burden accepted by those like us to spare honorable warriors such as you the disgrace of it all."

"Of course," Benjiro said. "Tell me anyway."

Taiku bowed. "Intermediaries, my lord."

Benjiro reclined somewhat, raising one eyebrow. "Intermediaries?"

"Hai, my lord," Taiku replied. "The simplest means of procuring the resources we require is to get them from the Crane."

"No mean feat, considering we are at war," Benjiro replied. "Did you steal them from the Crane? That would be impressive, but unacceptable."

"No, my lord," Taiku said. "As you may know, before my recent elevation to a procurement merchant, I spent nearly a decade forging trade agreements among the Minor Clans. I have several allies among the Sparrow Clan, men who are willing to overlook their Clan's relationship with the Crane in exchange for certain luxury items that are impossible to acquire in the Sparrow provinces."

"And these men were willing to betray not only their Clan, but the Crane as well?" Benjiro said. "That seems somewhat difficult to believe."

"Some of them required... convincing," Taiku said. "I gathered a great deal of useful information on many prominent figures during my years among the Minor Clans."

Benjiro seemed conflicted, with a smile and a frown warring on his face. "Your methods smack of the Scorpion," he finally said. "However, I cannot argue with your results." He waved the scrolls away. "Continue to produce this manner of results, and I think even my brother will come to know your name. You may go."

Taiku bowed, but it was quick. He felt dizzy. The Clan Champion might soon know his name? The thought was too much to bear.

The young merchant could barely contain his glee as he left.

"Did it go well?"

Taiku nearly shouted in surprise at the voice which greeted him outside the magistrate's office. He managed to bite down on the noise and quickly slid the door closed behind him. "What are you doing here?" he hissed, his voice a hoarse whisper. "You are not supposed to be here!"

The sinister looking man in the unremarkable clothing smiled. "I go where I please. Am I not a simple wave man, in search of an honest living?"

"We could be killed!" Taiku said.

"For what?" the stranger said. "Did you not admit that you have allies among the Minor Clans? Why not ronin as well?"

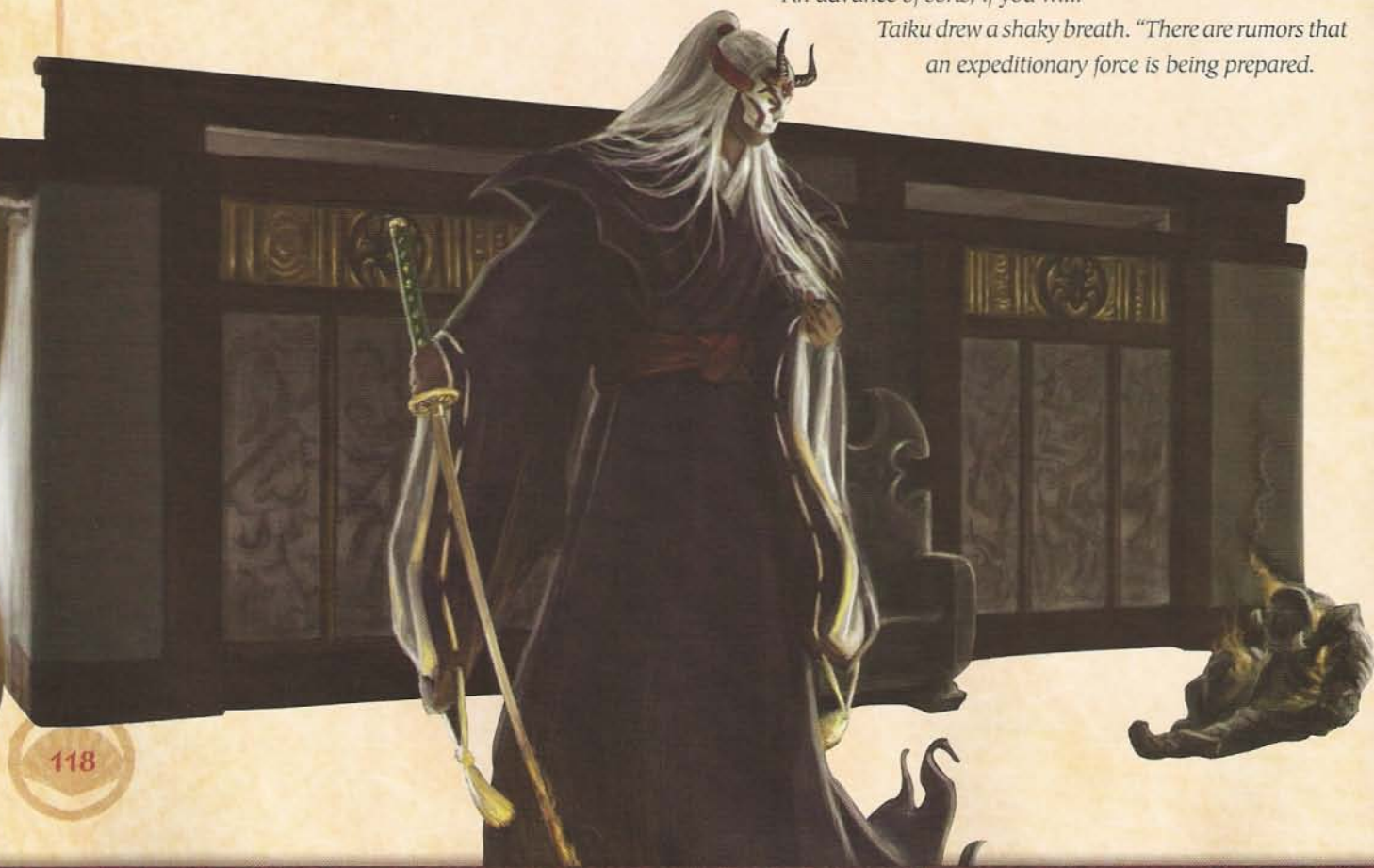
The merchant frowned. "It is too risky. We should not meet here, not so soon."

The ronin raised a cautionary finger. "You got what you wanted," he said. "You are more powerful and influential than you ever could have been on your own. The resources we provided you, the targets for your extortion schemes... all of it is a result of us. You have a debt, little Yasuki."

"I..." Taiku licked his lips. "I have not forgotten. I will not forget."

"Good," the ronin said. "Unfortunate things happen to those who forget their debts. Now, what can you offer me? An advance of sorts, if you will."

Taiku drew a shaky breath. "There are rumors that an expeditionary force is being prepared.



Resources are being pulled away from the reserves of the war with the Crane. They are being prepared to move, soon."

"Where?" the ronin demanded.

"I do not know for certain," Taiku said. "But!" he added hastily, seeing the irritation on the other man's face, "they are selecting officers from the Toritaka family, and scouts from the Hiruma with experience in forests."

"The Shinomen," the ronin replied. "Yes, that makes sense."

"Is it useful?" Taiku asked eagerly.

"Oh yes," the ronin replied. "I must leave immediately, but our employers will be pleased, very pleased, that you gained this information. Well done, Yasuki." He began to slip out the window, then glanced over his shoulder. "We will speak again soon."

The smile that had begun to form on Taiku's face disappeared instantly.

The Spider Families and the Courtier's Art

Just as the Great Clans have Families who work together to accomplish the Clan's goals, so too do the Spider have clearly defined Families with specific roles. Unlike the other Clans, however, blood and lineage are rarely important to the Spider. Instead, it is fealty, loyalty, and service that matter more than anything else. Anyone willing to subject themselves to the grueling, torturous displays of loyalty required by the Daigotsu family, for example, is permitted to bear their name. Those who are worthy will earn the privilege to retain it, and those who are not will perish in service to the Clan. Either way, the Spider prospers.

The Spider Clan holds a radically different philosophy from the other samurai Families of Rokugan. In particular, they eschew the code of Bushido that almost all other samurai hold sacred, and instead subscribe to a philosophy devised by Daigotsu and his vassals, one known as Shourido. Shourido is called by some "the dark path to victory," and calls upon those who study it to embrace their strengths to the exclusion of all else, using those strengths to seize that which they desire and to dominate those who are weaker than they. While some might admire this a philosophy of self-empower-

ment, it is in truth more an attitude of "might makes right" than anything else, and thus is ultimately at odds with the dictates of the Celestial Order upon which all of Rokugan's society is built. There are a few among the Great Clans who subscribe to this theory, but they are most often outcasts and malcontents who are unable to gain that which they desire through legitimate means. A true convert such as Doji Saori is rare indeed.

The Daigotsu

The ruling family of the Spider Clan is far and away the largest within its ranks as well. The Daigotsu are typically samurai and scouts, and are responsible not only for assessing the locations in which their battles will be fought, but for supplying the warriors who will fight them on behalf of the Spider. There are also a number of courtiers from the Daigotsu family who oversee aspects of their infiltration of the Empire personally, and attend remote courts as representatives of the Spider Clan – however, these are generally fewer in number than among the Chuda family.

More important than the strength of their arms, however, is the quality of Daigotsu samurai as leaders. Those who join their ranks are ruthlessly trained and drilled, their sensei watching carefully for signs of the potential for leadership. Those with such potential are subjected to even more ruthless training regimens, resulting in clear stratification between the military and political arms of the family. Daigotsu samurai who are chosen to serve politically are groomed for appearance, charisma, and taught to hone an innate ability to manipulate others, both within and without the Clan. For a Daigotsu, the key to understanding and manipulating another is in a form of seductive deception, convincing them that they want something that probably never came to mind before the Daigotsu suggested it, yet the Spider's honeyed words convince them they cannot live without it for any length of time.

The Daigotsu are the Spider Clan's greatest proponents of Shourido, for it was from their lord and master that the philosophy first originated. The tenets of Shourido as espoused by the Daigotsu family comprise the following:

Control – Control is without question the most important of the Dark Virtues for the Daigotsu family. The Daigotsu are in command of not only a vast conspiracy

to undermine the Empire, but several other Families of traditionally impulsive and explosively violent individuals. Thus, absolute control, of both others and themselves, is vitally important to all members of the family, not to mention a source of personal power.

Determination – The Daigotsu view determination as a secondary concern, but not an unimportant one. Determination is what allows them to focus their energies on what needs to be done to fulfill their lord's agenda. Determination is what allows them to control their allies and their enemies, and gives them the strength to push forward over whatever obstacles lie in their path.

Insight – The Daigotsu value insight, but they do not depend upon it. Insight is the instinctive understanding of others, and to rely solely upon instinct is an act of weakness and sloth. The Daigotsu instead actively seek out knowledge of others, and carefully compare that to other sources of information, to focus on a larger picture of what any individual or group thinks or does. Insight has its place as a source of information, but it cannot be counted upon in and of itself.

Knowledge – Knowledge is the weapon through which the Daigotsu conduct their manipulation of others. To know their enemy is to control their enemy, and that is the ultimate source of victory. The Daigotsu rely heavily upon gathering intelligence through their own family's scouts, the Chuda's magic, and the infiltration of the Goju. They take all of this information and use it to create a perfect map of their grand plan.

Perfection – Perfection is the ultimate goal of the Daigotsu. The dynasty they will craft from the corpse of the Empire of Rokugan will be perfect, just like their dark god. It will stand the test of time without weakness or wavering, and will endure forever. Each and every Daigotsu strives for perfection, whether it be as the perfect warrior or the perfect manipulator, or even the perfect sorcerer for those rare few who choose to focus on blood sorcery to the exclusion of their family's other talents. To the Daigotsu, perfection is the end, not the means.

Strength – Strength is an absolute necessity for every endeavor the Daigotsu undertake. Weakness is poison, and leads to failure. Strength of arms is required to crush the Daigotsu's enemies, and strength of will is necessary to overcome them in the courts, manipulate their leaders, and deceive them on an Empire-wide scale.

Will – Will is the armor of the Daigotsu family. They wrap themselves in an impenetrable layer of sheer will and ferocity, and it protects them against any who might threaten them. A Daigotsu samurai will fight long after his injuries should have claimed his life, and a Daigotsu courtier will continue to struggle against his enemies even if his position seems completely lost. In many cases, the sheer tenacity and force of will that such men possess affords them a chance at success when all others would fail.

The Chuda

The Chuda are the most versatile of the Spider Clan's Families, largely by virtue of the powerful magic at their command. With the ability to use both maho and a rather sinister brand of elemental magic, not to mention a family history of manipulation, stealth, and deceit, the Chuda are exceptionally important to Daigotsu's plan to infiltrate the other Clans. They are typically the advisors and strategists who stand at the side of a Daigotsu leader, and while many among their ranks find this position of subservience distasteful, they do not openly object. Only a short time ago, the Chuda as a whole essentially betrayed Daigotsu and served another master, the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban, when he deposed Daigotsu and seized control of the City of the Lost. In any other Clan, of course, that act would have sealed the entire family's fate forever. Daigotsu, however, understands the nature of ambition perhaps better than any other individual in the Empire, and allowed the Chuda to return to his service under certain restrictions, restrictions that remain in place to ensure the act of betrayal is never repeated. Chuda Mishime, daimyo of the Chuda family, seems almost desperate to prove his renewed loyalty to Daigotsu and to the Spider Clan's agenda, and none of his followers dare contradict his edicts demanding absolute, unquestioning loyalty at all times.

Due to their versatility, the Chuda are involved in literally every aspect of the Spider Clan's plan to seize the throne. They accompany the Goju to gather information on potential targets, using their magic to gain insight when all other means fail. They are present with the Order of the Spider in the field, defeating ronin and "bandits" to secure the Spider's reputation among the common folk, even occasionally employing maho on behalf of those same "bandits" to ensure that the peasants are aware of who, exactly, the villain is in any

given skirmish. They are present with the Daigotsu in various remote courts, Championing the Spider Clan as heroes of the people and seeking alliances with larger, more influential Families and Clans. And at the end, they will stand alongside their brothers and sisters and lay waste to those who have allied with them, wreaking havoc and chaos throughout the Empire, so that their lords the Daigotsu might craft a new and more powerful Empire from this one's ashes.

Control – Personal control is more important to the Chuda than control of external forces. External forces can be dominated and crushed, after all, but one must always maintain absolute control of oneself or else risk losing everything to forces beyond one's ability to wield them safely. The Chuda in particular use their self-control as a means of controlling their environment, as they craft minions and servitors out of their own flesh and blood (or the flesh and blood of others, on occasion), and use them to enact their will on the world around them.

Determination – The Chuda are nothing if not determined. To a man, they are devoted to the task of mastering an art that has destroyed virtually every living soul that has ever undertaken it. The Chuda apply this same determination to any task set before them by their lords, the Daigotsu. At present, the Chuda focus their determination on fulfilling the Spider Clan's agenda of infiltration, corruption, and elimination.

Insight – The Chuda consider insight one of the most valuable sources of knowledge. Insight is a flash of inspiration that comes from an unknown source, bestowing information that might not otherwise be available. The Chuda consider such flashes to be gifts from the kansen they employ for their maho, or occasionally secrets unconsciously wrested from the kami. Only the most valuable of secrets can be gained in this manner, and the Chuda prize them highly as they inevitably lead to some great stride being made in their advancement of the Spider Clan's agenda.

Knowledge – Knowledge is the ultimate pursuit for the Chuda, because it is only through knowledge that power can be obtained. The Chuda, as a whole, lust for power. It inspires them, drives them, obsesses them, and the quest for knowledge is the primary means by which they choose to pursue it. The Chuda know that the next great secret is just waiting to be discovered,

waiting for someone with the strength to do what must be done to obtain it. This obsession is not merely tolerated among the Chuda but actively encouraged. Chuda Mishime enjoys the notion of his vassals competing with one another for newer and greater secrets, confident in his belief that only the strongest will rise to gain his attention.

Perfection – The only perfection that concerns the Chuda is the perfection of their art: blood sorcery. They see maho as the ultimate expression of personal power, and as such it is the primary concern of each and every member of their family to advance their mastery of it to perfection. Obviously, this is an ever-ongoing pursuit.

Strength – Physical strength is not particularly a concern for the Chuda, as they consider metaphysical power far more important than anything the physical body can accomplish. Mere physical power can be overcome, or if necessary, can be gained temporarily from the appropriate spells. Conversely, it is a simple matter for the Chuda to enlist or even manufacture servitors who have far greater physical strength.

Will – A powerful will is paramount for the Chuda, who traffic in forces that can easily consume them if they are weak. Only focus and clarity of vision allow them to maintain the upper hand with the treacherous spirits they enlist for their spells, spirits that care little whether or not the Spider Clan succeeds, but instead live only for chaos and destruction. It is by will alone that the Chuda bend these spirits to serve them, and through them, serve the Spider Clan.

The Goju

The Goju serve as the delicate instrument of the Spider Clan's strategies, infiltrating and eradicating any obstacles that pose a threat to their plan but which cannot be removed normally because of a high profile or close scrutiny. The obvious inhumanity of most Goju prevent them from being used in any capacity where they interact with others, of course, but then the minions of the Shadow Dragon have very little interest or use for social interaction in any event. What the Goju do excel at, other than assassination, is the gathering of intelligence, and that has proven a key role for the family in the Spider Clan.

The Chuda's magic normally serves as the Spider Clan's principle means of acquiring information on potential targets, but there are occasions when the

Chuda cannot employ their talents for fear of detection. Shugenja in particular are difficult targets for them because their sensitivity to the elements makes the Chuda family's maho, or even the questionable type of elemental magic the Chuda can employ, too dangerous to use. In such instances, the Goju are called in to gather information. Their connection to the Nothing, linked as they are to that power source through the Shadow Dragon, is not traditionally detectable through normal magic. Indeed, there are but a handful of groups and individuals capable of detecting the Goju and their powers, which makes them ideal for sensitive targets. They are not suitable for large-scale use, however, not only because of their limited number but also because they generally make even oblivious targets uncomfortable with their presence, an unfortunate side effect of their supernatural abilities.

Unlike the other Spider Clan Families, the Goju have little reverence for Shourido. This is due to a number of reasons, most specifically because their peculiar mental state leaves little room for such a multi-layered philosophy.

Control – Control is not and has never been a priority for the Goju. In previous generations, they served an entity called the Lying Darkness, and it virtually subsumed them; they were not individuals, but rather a collective extension of its will and identity (or lack thereof). Since the Darkness was destroyed and its place in the cosmic hierarchy assumed by the Shadow Dragon, the Goju have been allowed more individuality in order to accomplish their assigned tasks for the Shadowlands and, after that, the Spider Clan. While the Goju clearly enjoy their role and duties, it is also clear to those few who know them that they have no particular interest in control of themselves or others, that instinct having been eradicated from them by the Darkness.

Determination – Determination is clearly a strength of the Goju, as they do not even consider the possibility of failure. When given a task, a Goju simply accepts that the task will be done. The possibility of failure does not enter into their mind, for they cannot fail. It is possible they may be killed in lieu of completing their assigned task, but this is a possibility they accept as part of the thrill of the hunt.

Insight – The Goju are creatures of instinct, placing little emphasis on knowledge but instead relying almost

exclusively on whatever information presents itself to them during the execution of their duties. While this is a facet of their unique mental make-up, it is enough to pique their interest in the philosophy of Shourido as a whole, and to satisfy the Daigotsu as to their participation in the Spider Clan.

Knowledge – The Goju do not care about knowledge. They gather it for their masters, but they have little interest in obtaining it for their own interests. As mentioned above, they are creatures of instinct, nothing else. They have no use for knowledge, and care little for that which they gather once it is passed on to their masters.

Perfection – The Goju believe they have perfected the arts of stealth, infiltration, and assassination, and there are very few in the Empire who could disagree with them. The Goju do not consider this a goal, but rather the product of their supernatural creation. They pay it little attention other than to occasionally use it to gloat before completing an assassination.

Strength – The Goju take great pride in their physical abilities, strength included. While these abilities are not the product of any effort or conditioning on their part, instead stemming from their link to the Shadow Dragon and the Nothing that it embodies, this has not prevented them from celebrating the power it grants.

Will – Like control, will is relatively unimportant to the Goju. Their supernatural abilities grant them protection from many forms of mental domination, and their years of complete servitude to other, more powerful patron entities has left them with relatively little will of their own. In a way, the Goju are the perfect servants: they have no ambition, very little personality, and live only for the challenge of fulfilling a difficult duty that no one else can easily perform.

The Order of the Spider

Although the Order of the Spider is not a family in the true sense, the strange and frightening men and women belonging to it fulfill a very specific role within the Spider Clan's campaign of deception and infiltration. The Order was created, in fact, specifically in order to assist in the Spider's plot, and has been in existence only slightly more than a year.

The Order is headed by two men, allies who have radically different histories and beliefs, but who both agree that the Spider Clan alone is worthy to rule the Empire and all who dwell within it. The monks Michio and Ros-

hungi have organized and recruited to fill the Order's membership, and it is through Michio's efforts that so many among the Order have no trace of the Shadowlands Taint. Having come from within the Empire, the monk found it easy to locate others such as himself, others with no use for the Brotherhood and its restrictive teaching, and so the ranks of the Order have quickly swelled.

The Order of the Spider is theoretically based in the Chuda's new Temple of Venom, located within the Shinomen Mori. In practice, however, its members are so scattered throughout the Empire that there is no central power base. Because monks are viewed with deference and respect by samurai and peasants alike, members of the Order are able to move all but unimpeded throughout the Empire. As sohei, or warrior monks, they are trained in all manner of weapons and martial arts, and it is the members of the Order who have earned the most goodwill among the common people of Rokugan. In fact, it was the monks of the Order who first began to spread word of the Spider through their actions. Only once the people had heard of the Spider in this way and begun to trust them did the arrival of armed samurai bearing the Spider mon become a possibility.

Members of the Order of the Spider are notoriously independent and pursue their own paths. As such, they are not necessarily enchanted with Shourido, but nei-

ther do they discount it out of hand. In fact, most members find at least one of its tenets to their liking.

Control – The only control that matters is control of the self. Control over one's environment is an illusion, and that is the principle reason that the Great Clans of Rokugan fail, because they believe they control the world around them. Spider monks understand that only by having absolute control over oneself can an individual express that control in others.

Determination – The Order places great value on determination, but they largely view it as an extension of will. Determination, resilience, and tenacity are all facets of one's will.

Insight – Insight is the revelation of the unknown to a seeker of truth, and for that the members of the Order are supremely grateful. It tells them their paths are correct. That those outside the Order lack such insight is only a sign of their failures.

Knowledge – Knowledge is a tool, nothing more. Still, it is a tool that can be put to tremendous use by those who understand how it can be employed. In this, the Order tends to defer to the Daigotsu, whom they respect greatly as innovators and strategists, and to whom they are grateful for providing all they require and allowing them to pursue their own paths in exchange for little else.



Perfection – Perfection is a goal. There is much to suggest that it cannot be achieved, and this is the belief of virtually every monastic order in existence except for the Spider. The Spider believe that they can find perfection by choosing the path that is true for an individual alone, rather than following some pre-ordained path determined by someone a monk does not know and has never met. The perfected form of an individual can only be achieved if that individual determines what precisely is required, and achieves it.

Strength – The Order of the Spider greatly values physical power, but only as an extension of mental strength. Physical strength without the mental fortitude to use it is completely meaningless and is in fact a disgraceful waste of potential.

Will – Will is true strength. Will is the strength to perceive what is true, and to pursue it when all others insist that to do so is folly. The Order values will above all else, and can rarely be dissuaded from whatever course they have set themselves upon.

The Spider Art of Politics

Perhaps more than any other Clan, the Spider have a clear, definitive agenda that they pursue relentlessly in their political endeavors, and each and every one of their agents adheres to this plan without question or deviation. There are no personal agendas within the Spider, for such things are not tolerated and result only in the death of the foolishly ambitious party.

In truth, the Spider Clan is a myth, a lie constructed by the Dark Lord of the Shadowlands, Daigotsu, as a means of achieving the first stage in his plan to seize the throne: infiltration. By cloaking themselves in the mantle of a Clan and behaving as Clans do, the Spider manage, if not to gain acceptance, to at least gain some semblance of neutrality in the eyes of certain individuals throughout the Empire.

The principle plan behind the Spider's campaign of infiltration was to use Daigotsu scouts, Chuda magic, and Goju espionage to locate individuals within the Great Clans who were, for whatever reason, frustrated, ambitious, and of generally questionable honor. Once

these individuals were located, the Spider then determined what it was that they needed or wanted most. In some cases it was resources they simply did not have available. In other cases it was wealth, or promotion, or love, or the death of a rival. Whatever it was, however, the Spider provided, on the condition that the individual benefiting from these actions would remember the new ally who supplied it.

This created a network of allies the Spider could depend upon, if for no other reason than that betraying the Spider would mean the loss of all they desired. Working slowly and carefully, the agents of Daigotsu have ensured that these allies gradually increase in power and influence, taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure this happens. In this way, the Spider's allies only increase in value, as they become more and more indebted to the Spider, and at the same time more able to provide that which the Clan requires. This is the second stage of the Spider's plan, the inexorable corruption of the weak and the ambitious within the ranks of the Great Clans.

Once their allies are in place and wielding a reasonable amount of influence, the Spider enact the third phase of their plan: alliance. Easily the most delicate stage involved, this requires extensive preparation for there to be any hope of success, and even then only a fraction of those approached could be reasonably expected to consider the offer. The first and simplest success was with the Unicorn Clan, to whom the Spider simply presented an offer of aid against the Lion Clan. The Unicorn were reluctant to accept such an offer, given the Spider's mysterious nature, but ultimately the Spider's reputation as defenders of the common man won them some degree of legitimacy, and a tentative, almost unspoken alliance was formed against Lion aggression during the latter days of the march toward Shiro Moto. This was but the first of many attempted alliances Daigotsu hoped to forge, and if even a fraction of them are successful, the plan can proceed to the final stage.

The final and by far the most sinister stage of the Spider's plan, one that is rapidly approaching as the race to take the throne gains more urgency throughout the Empire, is to violently destabilize all the Great Clans. Once the Spider have agents in place among as many Clans as possible, Daigotsu himself will issue a signal, and every Clan Champion, family daimyo, general, and

master courtier in every Clan will be targeted for assassination. No one with the ability to lead successfully will be spared. While it is not likely that all the Spider's targets will be laid low, hopefully enough will perish on that night that the Clans as a whole will succumb to chaos and confusion. It is hoped and intended that they will blame one another for this terrible treachery, greatly exacerbating their constant conflicts and leading to large-scale war between them, weakening them even further.

It is exactly this atmosphere of anarchy that Daigotsu desires, for only then can he seize and hold the throne, becoming Emperor Daigotsu the First in an Empire devoted to the worship and reverence of Fu Leng, the Fallen God.

The Crab Clan

Not surprisingly, the Crab have proved one of the most difficult Clans to infiltrate, and the one the Spider are most cautious in dealing with. The Crab have over a thousand years of history dealing with, combating, and eliminating threats spawned by the Shadowlands, including infiltrators and shape-shifters, so naturally the Spider approach them with caution. Almost without exception, the Spider have limited themselves to the most debased and greedy Yasuki, the only family in the Crab with any realistic chance of suffering corruption from within. Even then, however, the Spider dare not operate within the Crab provinces themselves, but instead target those Yasuki sent to minor, out of the way holdings in other Clans' lands. By focusing on the most minor and unimportant locations, the Spider hope to target those Yasuki who have the most to gain and the least to lose. While Daigotsu's agents have had little luck in actually gaining a foothold within the Clan, they at least have managed to secure a network of informants that keeps them up to date on any actions the Crab take with regard to the Spider. It is only this, in fact, that has warned the Spider of a possible impending Crab attack on their holdings within the Shinomen Mori.

The Crane Clan

The Crane Clan is of particular interest to the Spider Clan for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the Crane have extensive influence over the court system of Rokugan, almost to the point of having control of the institution as a whole. Infiltrating the Crane would allow

the Spider to employ their machinations against a number of otherwise completely inaccessible targets; there are, after all, very few avenues closed to the Crane. Beyond that, the Crane possess wealth, both financial and in terms of raw resources, that is unrivaled by virtually all other Great Clans save the Mantis, and even then the holdings are so different that the Crane offer many things the Mantis cannot. Additionally, the Crane are close allies with both the Lion and Phoenix Clans, two Clans that have proven difficult to infiltrate for a variety of reasons. Access to the Crane's reputation and influence would make gaining ground against both of those Clans far simpler, and for that reason Daigotsu has chosen to oversee the infiltration of the Crane Clan personally.

Perhaps the most specific reason that the Spider wish to gain allies within the Crane, however, is one known only to a handful of the Clan's most powerful and influential members. The immortal artisan Yajinden, easily one of Daigotsu's most powerful vassals, is certain that the artifact known as the Anvil of Despair is present somewhere in the Crane lands. Should this artifact come into Yajinden's hands, there is no end to the power he could garner for the Spider, so much so that their entire plan of infiltration might become unnecessary, and the seizure of the throne by force might be possible. However, Daigotsu is not one to place all his hopes on a single possibility.

The Crane's near-stranglehold on court events throughout the Empire makes them a more palatable target to attack through third parties, rather than directly, as any unknown party arriving in a court attracts the Clan's full attention. The Spider's primary route of attack has been through the Sparrow Clan, a Minor Clan spawned from the Crane's ranks that still maintains close ties to their parent Clan. The Sparrow have proven ideal for gaining entrance into the Crane's ranks, as the Crane regard the Sparrow well enough to permit them entry, but do not consider them enough of a political entity to subject them to any real scrutiny.

The Dragon Clan

As other groups like the Kolat have discovered throughout history, the Dragon are extremely difficult to infiltrate. Daigotsu does not believe that the Dragon Champion, Togashi Satsu, is as omniscient as others believe, however, and he has not abandoned the notion of gain-

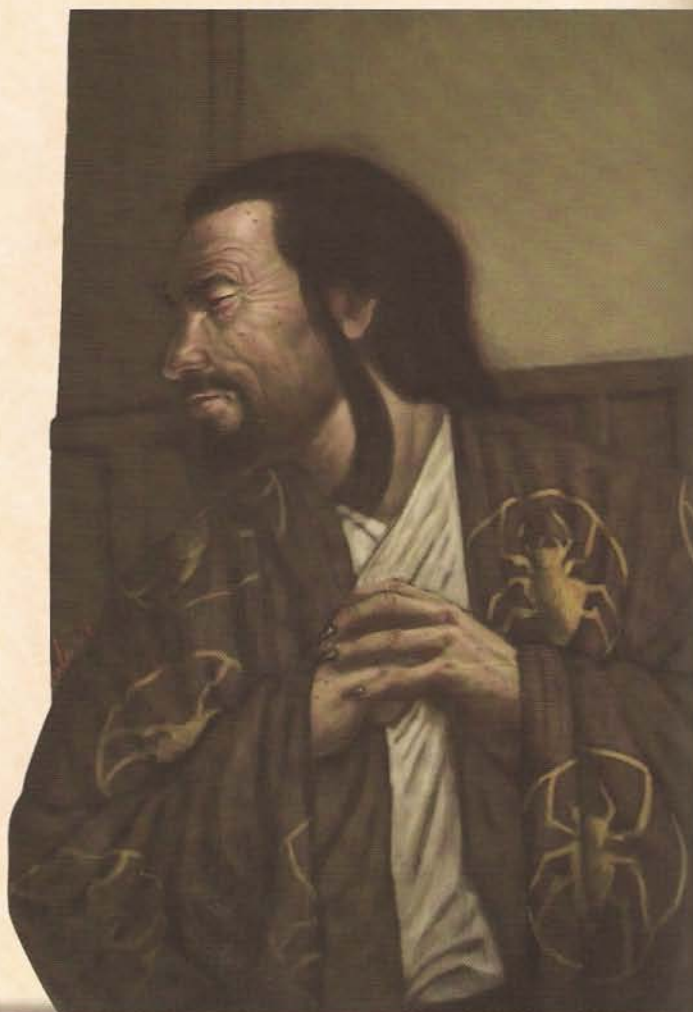
ing entrance to the Dragon lands just yet. Unexpectedly, the greatest threat posed by the Dragon to the Spider's plans has been that of the Togashi order. Initially dismissed by Daigotsu and his advisors as little more than an annoyance, the Togashi have taken up arms against the Order of the Spider with surprising fervor. It is the belief of Daigotsu that the cause of this unexpected turn is the recovery of the artifact known as the Jade Mirror. This ancient nemuranai, once lost to time but recently recovered from the Tomb of the Seven Thunders, has inspired the Togashi to seek new purpose in combating corruption throughout the Empire. This has led them into conflict with the Order of the Spider after a handful of unfortunate encounters that ended poorly. Now the Togashi suspect the truth behind the Order, and have moved to thwart their efforts at every turn. Thus far the conflict has been little more than an annoyance to the Spider, but as more members of the Togashi commit to the effort, it will become more and more troublesome. In the meantime, Daigotsu's agents continue to seek weaknesses within the Dragon Clan as a whole, still hoping to eventually bring the Clan of Togashi down from within.

The Lion Clan

The Lion have proven problematic for the Spider for many of the same reasons that they have been simple for other Clans to manipulate in the past. Their general reluctance to trust outsiders, particularly those with whom they are not familiar, has made it extremely difficult for Daigotsu's agents to even gain entrance into the Lion provinces, much less gain their trust. With the Lion's list of allies extremely short, numbering primarily the Crane and Hare, attempts to infiltrate them have

continued to be frustrated. Fortunately, however, the Crane Clan's status as a primary target for the Spider has at last opened an opportunity, as the current close alliance between the two Clans makes it a bit easier to gain entrance into Lion courts. Daigotsu would like nothing more than to manipulate the Lion – Crane alliance in order to get a foothold within the Lion Clan, then collapse the alliance and then leave the Lion with virtually no friends to call upon for aid when the Spider finally make their move against the Clan's leadership.

Ironically, although the infiltration stage has been largely thwarted with regard to the Lion, the destabilization stage has been more successful thanks in large part to the Lion's tendency for frequent conflict with other Clans. In particular, the Lion Clan's ongoing war with the Unicorn has made it simple for Goju assassins to remove several important Lion officers who might have eventually posed a threat to the Spider, all the while shunting blame on the already-despised Unicorn Clan. Other, less prominent skirmishes, both martial and political, with the Mantis Clan have likewise allowed the Spider further opportunities to disrupt the Lion.



The Mantis Clan

Surprisingly, the Mantis Clan proved the easiest for the Spider to establish an alliance with, if only an alliance of convenience and non-interference. The Spider gained a foothold in the Clan early with the defection of Yoritomo Hotako, who became Daigotsu's Obsidian Champion and who provided valuable insight into the Mantis's actions and activities. Daigotsu delivered word to mantis Champion Yoritomo Naizen that the Spider would not interfere with any Mantis activity, legal or otherwise, under any circumstances so long as the Mantis extended the same courtesy to the Spider. The obvious implied threat was that, should the Mantis interfere, the Spider had knowledge of many of their less savory activities, such as piracy, and would see to it that they were exposed if the Clan of Yoritomo did not cooperate.

For the time being, at least, this arrangement has held. Whether it will survive if the Mantis learn the true nature of the Spider Clan, however, is quite another matter. Still, even if the effort to infiltrate the Mantis ultimately fails, Daigotsu will not consider it a major loss, given the relative weakness of the Mantis in the overall affairs of the Empire.

The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix are problematic for the Spider, both because of their great skills with the magic of the kami and because of the Clan's long history of combating corruption, both within its own ranks and elsewhere in the Empire. Other than the Kuni family of the Crab Clan, the Phoenix order of Inquisitors is perhaps the greatest threat the Spider face, and as such they have generally avoided them.

Fortunately for the Spider, they have the advice of the former Asako Kinuye, a brilliant and exceptionally powerful maho-tsukai who remained hidden within the Phoenix Clan's ranks for decades before finally being ousted by the Council of Elemental Masters. With Kinuye's assistance, the Spider have begun to target remote and disillusioned individuals within the Clan, hoping to gain entrance to a formerly closed system. It remains to be seen whether this plan will succeed, but the Spider feel more hopeful about their prospects with the Phoenix than they do with the Lion or the Crab.

The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion have proven a dangerous foe for the Spider, as they were among the first to discover the Spider's manipulations of various ronin and bandit groups throughout the Empire, and quickly determined to discover the truth behind the Clan's plans. Bayushi Paneki has ordered the Scorpion to discover the true nature of the Spider Clan. While the Spider have managed to keep their enemies at bay and prevent them from confirming anything without question, Paneki and many others among the Scorpion suspect the true motives and intentions of the Spider Clan, and a bloody war already rages in the shadows between the Shosuro family and the Goju infiltrators. Unfortunately, the Scorpion are well versed in dealing with the minions of the Nothing, and this has placed the Goju at a disadvantage in facing them.

Were the Order of the Spider not committed to combating the Togashi and their interference, Daigotsu would surely order Michio to pit his sohei against the Scorpion. Perhaps because of this dual threat posed by the two Clans, Daigotsu has made weakening the alliance between the Dragon and the Scorpion a priority, if for no other reason than to prevent the two exchanging information about the Spider Clan.

If there is one thing about their conflict with the Scorpion which offers hope to the Spider, it is the fact that the Scorpion Clan's rejection of traditional Bushido makes them potentially more vulnerable to the sort of corruption which the Spider offer. Of course, the Scorpion work hard to root out disloyalty and treason within their own ranks, but the Spider feel confident they can still make significant gains against the Clan of Secrets.

The Unicorn Clan

The Unicorn are a Clan desperately in need of allies, and that has made them ripe for infiltration or even an overt alliance with the Spider. Daigotsu and his advisors simply waited for the Lion offensive to pierce the inner provinces of the Moto family, then approached some of the less prominent family daimyo through intermediaries, offering their support. With several puppets already in place among the lower and mid-ranked provincial daimyo, it was a simple matter for the Spider to exert enough influence to make the Unicorn at least seriously consider the offer, which is all the Spider re-

quired to consider it a victory. With the Clan already positively predisposed toward the Spider due to their reputation as "Champions of the people," offering aid in rebuffing the Lion proved almost too tempting to pass up, and while the Khan made no formal decision, many Unicorn commanders have begun including small units of Spider forces alongside their commands when facing the Lion on the battlefield.

The Minor Clans

Daigotsu does not consider the Minor Clans worthy of his interest as anything more than a means of infiltrating more important enemies who are otherwise inaccessible. That the Spider have infiltrated the ranks of the Sparrow Clan, for instance, offers them nothing save an opportunity to gain entrance to the Crane Clan. The only Minor Clans which the Spider have considered worthy of concerted attention in their own right are the Ox Clan, owing to their heavy cavalry and skill on the battlefield, and the Hare Clan, whose penchant for hunting maho-tsukai has earned both enmity and grudging respect from many among the Spider's ranks.

At the general philosophical level, however, Daigotsu considers the Minor Clans a pitiful annoyance with no value whatsoever. When the throne is his, he will offer them a single chance to swear allegiance to him forever. Those who accept will be spared, and those who refuse will be eradicated from the face of the earth as an object lesson to the Great Clans. That, Daigotsu believes, will be more useful than anything the Minor Clans could do while still in existence.

The Imperial Families

The Spider look upon the Imperial Families with disgust, as they consider them to be one of the greatest symptoms of the Empire's sickening decay. While the Seppun do have a certain value as warriors, and the Miya as heralds and historians, they are both subordinate to the Otomo, who in the Spider view have absolutely no value whatsoever. The Otomo are sniveling bureaucrats who do nothing that does not protect their own sheltered position as sycophants and dilettantes. Daigotsu thus views the Imperials much like the Minor Clans: the Seppun and the Miya will be given a single chance to embrace the new dynasty once the Spider assume control of the Empire. It is not expected that the Seppun will capitulate, but they at least will be given a

warrior's death. The Otomo, on the other hand, will suffer the fate that should have been theirs centuries ago, finally dispatched as the useless wretches they are.

Ronin

Ronin are fodder to be used and discarded, and nothing more. The ronin population of Rokugan, disenfranchised and destitute as they often are, has little political value even to the Spider. It has, however, proven an excellent tool for the Spider to use in their campaign of disinformation and manipulation, and the more ruthless and brutal in the ronin ranks have become willing recruits to the new Clan. When the new dynasty comes, more than a few of these ronin will have found a permanent home in the ranks of the Spider Clan. Any who remain independent will be watched carefully and eliminated as necessary, for Daigotsu has no intention of allowing a population of unsupervised warriors to grow unchecked as it has during the previous dynasties.

Gaijin

Ironically, the Spider are as intolerant of other cultures and races as the most inflexible Lion samurai, and yet they have more connections among distant lands than any save the Mantis and Unicorn Clans. Daigotsu himself has traveled to the distant lands across the Burning Sands, and has an alliance of sorts with the group of criminals, outcasts, and necromancers known as the Jackals. Despite the Spider Clan's distaste for these individuals, they accept them because they serve the Clan's greater agenda, and do so with a properly subservient manner. So long as gaijin accept that their place is one of servitude, the Spider are content to allow them to continue to exist. For now.

Politics: The Ways of the Spider

Because the Spider Clan is a self-titled organization that has not been recognized by any Emperor, those of the Clan who manage to gain entry to the courts must usually do so in the guise of ronin. This makes for a challenging assignment, for a ronin's lot in court is a difficult one, but the samurai of the Spider do not hesitate to take on such challenges at the orders of their lord.

Court is largely an invitation-only affair, and any ronin who appears uninvited at court will, if he is lucky, merely be expelled. More rigid hosts might have him executed for his arrogant presumption. Thus, Spider samurai who attend other Clans' court are always careful to arrange invitations through intermediaries, preferably a minor faction like the Sparrow where they have made significant inroads. Some Spider can also arrange to attend court in the guise of a yojimbo for a Clan samurai, or as representatives for unaligned villages which are large enough to be worthy of some attention from the nearest Clan daimyo. The ideal source of such an invitation would be Nanashi Mura, of course, but that ronin settlement is under the protection of the Dragon Clan, and so far the Spider have had little luck in infiltrating it.

There is one other option that can bring a ronin to court, and the Spider are not above exploiting it: amusement. Cruel courtiers may bring a ronin along just to provide some excitement for the court, and certain dishonorable courtiers derive considerable amusement from watching a wave-man struggle to deal with some incredibly delicate court situation. From the Spider perspective, this sort of invitation is almost ideal, since it reveals the moral weakness of the courtier issuing the invitation even as it offers an opening for the Spider to attend a court.

Court life is traditionally not easy for ronin, but the samurai of the Spider are no strangers to difficulty, given the harsh and cruel training they undergo. In court they are surrounded by hostility, for even the most open-minded of courtiers tend to regard a wave-man as little more than a curiosity, and will likely take frequent opportunity to make him feel out of place. Traditionalist courtiers from factions like the Crane, Phoenix, Otomo, and Lion will likely find the ronin's mere presence an affront to the honor of the court itself. Thus, any misstep or inappropriate comment, however slight, will bring immediate demands for the offending ronin's banishment or even outright execution.

A ronin in court, whether a real one or a Spider in disguise, will quickly become accustomed to feeling all eyes upon him whenever he speaks or enters a room. Courtiers smirk with amusement at his every word and action, half-hiding their reactions behind upraised fans. Outright hostility and rudeness will be rare, naturally,

since this would violate etiquette and insult the host of the court. However, thinly veiled disgust will be common, and most courtiers will quickly excuse themselves from any conversation with a wave-man.

Nonetheless, it is quite possible for a ronin to find allies in court, and the opportunities for networking and infiltration are so great that the Spider never pass up on such a chance. Younger or older guests who are more open-minded, or courtiers from less traditionalist Clans like the Unicorn, Mantis, or Dragonfly, often take an interest in wave-men, and the courts can be the perfect environment for a Spider to scout out those weak-minded individuals who can be approached later with tempting offers.

Any Spider in court must be alert to the risk of being targeted by the schemes and games of manipulative courtiers. These sorts of individuals naturally tend to seek out the obvious and easy target of a wave man at court. The goal of their games is to humiliate and demean the ronin in front of his host, and honorable ronin trapped in these machinations quickly become bewildered, disoriented, and disgraced. Here again the Spider have an advantage, for their ruthless methods and intense training makes them well-suited to withstand these courtly onslaughts or even to turn them back against their perpetrators. Still, they must be on their guard. While normal protocols in Rokugan demand that a samurai must gain permission from the appropriate daimyo to avenge an insult, ronin have no lord, and any insult may be immediately and fatally avenged with only the permission of the host of the court.

The Courts of the Spider

The Spider Clan is, by its nature, forced to act quite differently than any of the Great Clans of Rokugan. Much of the Spider's political activity is, by necessity, covert, but they have been gaining recognition wherever possible. Their centers of power thus involve both their own handful of actual courts and a variety of other minor courts throughout Rokugan where they have been able to gain and spread their influence. These can range from the courts of Great Clans to Minor Clan holdings

and temples scattered around Rokugan. Different locations require different tactics, of course, and the specific goals of the Spider Clan can vary wildly from location to location.

Black Silk Castle

The Spider do not have a location that is officially their main court. Instead, the functions of their court follow Daigotsu, no matter which of their holdings he is occupying at any given time. No one who needs to speak with him waits for him to return to a single location. Instead they seek him out – although this is not without hazard, as his moods can be capricious and he does not give any of his underlings advance notice of his movements.

Despite this, Black Silk Castle has become the one location that he prefers use when dealing with normal courtly activities. In the past it has been apparent that Daigotsu wishes to create a semblance of one of the more traditional Clans, and one of the ways he does this is to mimic many of the activities of one of their courts. The castle was built with a traditional main court chamber, complete with dais and throne, where Daigotsu can sit and observe the diplomatic intrigues around him.

Black Silk Castle is hidden deep within the Shinomen Forest. Daigotsu wished to have a location that could remain hidden from the notice of the samurai of Rokugan, while still being close enough to access those same samurai at will. In addition, if Daigotsu were to gain legitimacy within the Empire (something that seems unlikely, but the Dark Lord insists on being ready to take advantage of any opportunity), Black Silk Castle would be positioned to accept envoys from other Clans without too much difficulty.

The castle's evocative name seems to have come from the choice of décor, but in actuality it evolved differently. Daigotsu named the structure as it was being built surreptitiously. The name was meant to be a reflection of the manner in which the Spider were planning to infiltrate the Empire, like the strands of spiderwebs, weaving amongst the other Clans and spreading darkness wherever they could find purchase. Despite this, those who were tasked with decorating the castle took the name somewhat literally, so the stronghold houses what could very well be the greatest quantity of black silk in Rokugan. The court chambers are deco-

rated with wall hangings of black crests laid upon black fields. There are black cushions around the main dais and scattered about the chamber. In fact, the desire for black silk has made the court somewhat more comfortable than an outsider with any knowledge of the Dark Lord would have expected.

Daigotsu's throne is an imposing structure. It appears to be carved out of obsidian, the same stone that was used to make the wall of the court. Appearances can be deceiving – the throne was built separately and it is only the combined efforts of an Asahina artisan and a Kaiu engineer, both now members of the Lost, that was able to create this illusion.

The castle itself was built with the understanding that the presence of the Spider in Rokugan could be met with resistance and hostility. Thus it was constructed to be defensible, aided considerably by its inaccessible location. The outer walls are thick, with towers securing each corner. The only opening in the wall has gates of heavy iron-banded wood, as strong as the gates to any Crab castle. In addition to the overt defenses, the castle has a secret tunnel underneath the walls, known by only a few who dwell inside. Its purpose is to serve as a strategic retreat route for Daigotsu (and his inner circle, if it suits the Dark Lord) in the event of a strong attack.

While Black Silk Castle is not one of the major staging areas for the Spider army, it still houses a sizable military force. In addition, almost every inhabitant has martial training or ability. Daigotsu does not abide weakness, so even the lowliest court functionary is armed at all times and will fight to defend master and castle to the death.

The most important person in the courts of Black Silk Castle is clearly Daigotsu himself. The Dark Lord of the Shadowlands rules over his followers with absolute power and this extends to how he conducts himself in his court. He does not act in a random fashion, but all within the court are keenly aware that his desires are paramount. If anything leads Daigotsu to believe that anyone within the court is no longer of use to him or the Spider, that person will be disposed of, quickly and mercilessly. Those in the court walk a tightrope, trying to appear useful while avoiding the appearance of sycophancy. They understand that loyal and effective service is always rewarded, however. Those not used to Daigotsu's style of leadership may believe him cruel,

but when it comes to the courts and the Spider's place within Rokugan, he really practices an extreme pragmatism. For Daigotsu, the ends always justify the means.

The lady Shahai, while standing somewhat in the shadow of Daigotsu, still wields substantial power within the courts of the Spider. Shahai has no official position within the court, but her marriage to the Dark Lord allows her certain privileges afforded no others. Everyone surrounding the Spider's ruling family treats her with deference. Her attitude towards the court is different from Daigotsu. While he wishes a semblance of legitimacy, she looks on the trappings of a Rokugani court with little more than amusement. She will not speak against it, out of respect for the one she loves, but she plays cruel games with the occupants of the court, turning one against another, for no reason other than to entertain herself. She is also quicker to kill than Daigotsu, although she is careful not to order the death of anyone who may still have a use to the Dark Lord.

Daigotsu Kanpeki is the son of Daigotsu and Shahai. He is still a baby, but in his own way he is the most important person in Black Silk Castle. While Daigotsu does not express affection publicly for his son, it is well known that much of what he is trying to accomplish is in his name. All who serve the Spider revere the boy

as the beginning of a new dynasty. No one within the court will ever say anything against Kanpeki, even in jest. In fact, most never speak of him, in order to avoid a remark that could inadvertently give offense to either of his parents, an unquestionably fatal mistake.

Wherever Daigotsu Kanpeki can be found, Kyomasa is inevitably present as well. Kyomasa is an ogre who swore fealty to Daigotsu, breaking from the rest of his people, a tribe called the Mikata. After he proved his worth, Daigotsu made him the personal yojimbo to Kanpeki. As such, he is treated with great respect by those within the court, as an insult to Kyomasa could be perceived as an insult to Kanpeki, or even to Daigotsu himself. For his part, Kyomasa prefers to avoid the court whenever possible, as he does not feel comfortable there. His duties, however, require him to attend whenever Daigotsu or Shahai request the presence of their son. He rarely speaks on these occasions, answering only when spoken to, and maintaining absolute vigilance against any possible threats to his charge.

Outside envoys to the Spider are very rare. Dealings with the Clans are conducted elsewhere, and Black Silk Castle remains hidden, as do all major Spider holdings. The few who enter the Castle who are not already under Daigotsu's sway are met with a sort of false courtesy. If Daigotsu wishes to see them, they are ushered before him with a smirking politeness that reveals the

confidence all who dwell within have towards their Master. If the meeting ends with Daigotsu accepting the visitor as an ally, the courtesy becomes real. If, on the other hand, the visit ends in Daigotsu's rejection of the visitor's entreaties, the castle's occupants usually do not have to continue any sort of pretence, and the unfortunate guest's fate is a harsh one. Daigotsu is not one to hide his displeasure.

When Black Silk Castle was constructed, a series of guest rooms were built. They are decorated in black silk, of course, but they include splashes of color that do not appear elsewhere in the Castle. Each room has been set up to try to appeal to members of one or another of the



Great Clans, if they were ever to send regular envoys to the Spider. For now they sit unused, but they are kept regularly maintained, and Daigotsu feels confident there will come a day when the Spider are accepted on their own terms. When that day arrives, he wants the Clans to come to him, in proper acknowledgment of his power and status.

The City of the Rich Frog

The Spider have to use different methods of gaining political power than other Clans. Their access to most of the great courts of Rokugan is very limited, and one of the Clans they have almost no access to is the Lion. Since they have found no way to insinuate themselves amongst the Lion directly, the Spider have placed their agents in a holding that has only relatively recently come under firm Lion control: the City of the Rich Frog.

Daigotsu believes that infiltrating the court of Toshisano Kanemichi Kaeru affords the Spider certain opportunities. The primary goal is to gain the trust of the Lion, naturally, and all efforts are being made to accomplish that feat. However, if the Spider fail in that, they can use their position within the City of the Rich Frog to aid the Unicorn in their ongoing war against the Lion. This fits with Daigotsu's policy of keeping all avenues of advantage open until they prove useful.

While the Spider employ agents in a variety of areas within the city, their primary efforts are within the Fallen Mountain Dojo. The Badger Clan's dojo was constructed in the city decades ago, separate from the lands of the Minor Clan, in order to help the Clan rebuild after their near-extinction from a brutal oni attack. The Badger trained here primarily serve as mercenaries in order to collect the funds needed to bring their Clan back to full health. Under these circumstances it was not difficult for the Spider to gain a foothold. In the guise of a Badger samurai, Ichiro Daichi, a Spider samurai has taken on the role of maintaining the purity and strength of the Badger, a role which none would suspect of concealing ulterior motives. In addition, Daichi's reputation amongst those in the city is strong and he is very well respected. Even the local Lion samurai know of Daichi and his insistence in the importance of maintaining honor, even in these hard times for the Badger. The Lion respect his reputation, and Daichi is always watching for an opportunity to turn that respect into an invitation to a Lion court.

Most people go to the Fallen Mountain Dojo for one of two reasons. Either they are ronin who wish to train with the Badger, or they are prospective employers who wish to make use of the Clan's services. When ronin approach the Badger, Daichi interviews them personally whenever he is able. Officially, he is ensuring that the applicant will respect the honor of the Badger and do nothing to cast them in a bad light. This is an easy front for Daichi, since he does not put on an act – he actually performs that task, just as he claims. What is not known by the rest of the Badger, or the Lion of the city, is what happens after rejected applicants leave the dojo. Daichi uses the interview to not only weigh their prospective value to the Badger, but to the Spider as well. Ronin who seem like the sort who can be of use to Daichi's true Clan are approached not long after being sent away from the Fallen Mountain Dojo. Daichi is adept at his job and most who are approached in this manner become new members of the Spider. Those that reject these overtures simply vanish.

When it is a prospective employer who approaches the Badger, Daichi functions in much the same way. If the task they wish to hire the Badger for is something the Clan can perform while still behaving in an honorable manner, Daichi will recommend that they take the job. If not, the job will often still be performed – just not by the Badger. The Spider use the information gathered by Daichi to find opportunities to further their own reputation among the people of Rokugan.

The dojo itself is a simple structure that was built initially only to perform its official role as a place to train Badger samurai. In recent years, as the Clan has worked to rebuild, it has undergone some hurried reconstruction. Now there is an audience chamber where Daichi can meet with prospective recruits and clients. It appears much like a small court, but Daichi prefers to conduct his interviews in private, so there are rarely any other Badger present.

There are times when Daichi brings candidates out into the dojo proper for them to demonstrate their martial skills. He urges them to not hold anything back while fighting against the Badger samurai. If any show any sign of viciousness or a violent nature beyond what is strictly required, however, he dismisses them, claiming that a true samurai should maintain a calm reserve at all times, even in trying circumstances. These rejected samurai are invariably approached by Spider agents.

It is Daichi's belief that while these skills may not suit the Badger, they are certainly an asset to his true Clan.

Ichiro Kihongo, the Badger daimyo, often takes residence in the Fallen Mountain Dojo, which he founded. However, he does not interfere with Daichi's methods. Sometimes Daichi will ask Kihongo to interview a prospective candidate personally, but only once Daichi is convinced that the samurai would make a better Badger than a Spider.

Kyuden Kumiko

The Mantis are the first Clan to accept the Spider into one of their courts. They do not completely trust the Spider, but they respect the work they are doing in fighting bandits and protecting the people of Rokugan, a goal close to the hearts of the Mantis. For this reason, more than any other, the Mantis chose not to delve too deeply into the Spider's true nature. Additionally, the Mantis have been recruiting from outside their Clan into their ranks. They see the Spider as an organization that can be watched, possibly exploited, and absorbed if they prove worthy and amenable.

Due to the secretive nature of the Spider and the possibility that they are not what they seemed, the Mantis invited them to attend the court at Kyuden Kumiko rather than their main court at Kyuden Gotei. This allowed them to appear amenable to relations between the two groups, while still keeping the newcomers at a distance and protecting the Mantis holdings in their core islands.

While this arrangement lasts, Kyuden Kumiko is one of only two courts of Great Clans where the Spider can attend openly as equals, even if all the other attendees did not know their true nature. (Shiro Ide is the other – see Appendix Two for details.) At the Mantis Winter Court of 1170, Daigotsu Usharo attended, using the family name of Otomo in order to freely mingle with the other guests without drawing unwanted questions. The Mantis hosts were aware that this was a deception, but they did not know the extent of it, as they knew him simply as Usharo. What the Mantis were not aware of was that Usharo was not the only representative of the Spider in the area around Kyuden Kumiko. Goju Zeshin also resides near the palace, acting as an intermediary for mercenaries in the area. The Mantis make liberal use of his services, unaware that he is also the main funnel for Usharo's information flow back to Daigotsu.

While they have access to Kyuden Kumiko, the Spider use it as an opportunity to spread propaganda about themselves and their purpose in Rokugan. Whenever possible they pass on stories they 'heard' about a group of ronin who have taken to fighting banditry throughout the Empire. They also embellish the stories and do whatever they can to paint these actions in the best possible light. They hope this will set the groundwork for advancements among other Clans, where they have yet to be accepted. If successful, this could lead to the Spider being hailed as heroes throughout the Empire.

Newcomers to Kyuden Kumiko are assessed by Usharo, to see if they can be of any use to the Spider. If not, he avoids them, since unnecessary contact could expose him. Usharo particularly avoids contact with any Imperials who come to the court, out of concern for his cover story. Anyone who investigates this unknown 'Otomo' could soon discover that there was indeed once an Otomo Usharo, but he fell from favor and then vanished. While Usharo had a story to explain his absence, he prefers to avoid the issue altogether. If he sees an opportunity among the court attendees, on the other hand, he does not hesitate to make the acquaintance of the new arrival.

Anyone coming to the court, whether Usharo contacts them or not, finds him to be popular among the courtiers there. He enjoys the arts and often encourages poets and playwrights to follow various avenues in their art, even acting as a patron for some of them. Of course, he uses these artists as an extension of his propaganda efforts. The works subtly promote the idea that there are heroes from outside the Great Clans who work for the welfare of the Empire. Even Toturi is good subject for this sort of propaganda, as pieces about him emphasize his days as a noble ronin, serving the Empire in his own way.

Whether or not the Mantis continue to allow Usharo access to Kyuden Kumiko, he has already accomplished much. The seeds he has planted there are sinking roots, and the Spider have a growing influence in this court.

Kyuden Moshibaru

The Crab pose an interesting conundrum for the Spider. On the one hand, they are the greatest threat to Daigotsu's reign, as they are committed to destroying him and all who follow him. On the other hand, the Crab have a method of entry to their Clan that the Spider can, and

have, exploited – the Twenty Goblin Winter. Using this method, the Spider actually have an agent, Kirazai, who has been offered fealty by the Crab Clan. This is unprecedented, as while the Spider have many agents posing as members of Minor Clans, Kirazai is the only Spider to be invited to join one of the Great Clans.

Hida Kuon called for a Twenty Goblin Winter in the most recent season, and while the appearance of Hida Sozen is what caught the interest of the residents of Shinsei's Last Hope, it was the scruffy ronin named Kirazai that the Crab should have been paying attention to. Kirazai came to Shinsei's Last Hope in the same manner as many other ronin, and ventured out into the Shadowlands apparently determined to bring back the required twenty heads. He did so with ease, since Omoni had sent a score of goblins to him for just that purpose. He returned, with little fanfare, swore the oath, and joined the Moshibaru vassal family.

Moshibaru Kirazai's time amongst the Crab has been relatively short, but he has done his best to ingratiate himself with them. His method of doing so is the one the Crab respect best: he has trained hard and has been

a model Crab student in all ways. He has taken assignments on the Wall as well as in Yasuki lands. He hopes to prove himself as a Moshibaru and then accept a promotion to the Hida family. Once a true Hida, he will serve loyally as a defender of the Empire... while slowly use his skills to convince the other Crab that the Spider wish only to serve the Empire, and have no connection to the Shadowlands.

Kirazai uses his place at Kyuden Moshibaru to watch the others who joined the Crab through the Twenty Goblin Winter. He tries to uncover the motivations of each, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Whenever he finds a samurai who has joined the Crab to gain the fellowship denied those that are ronin, Kirazai will try to separate them from the rest of the students. He will emphasize differences and mock any deficiencies in their training. He attempts to show those samurai that merely joining a Great Clan does not ensure they are treated well.

Those that join the Crab in order to fight against the menace of the Shadowlands face a different Kirazai. He will try to befriend them and talk about their shared



hatred of the great beasts that dwell on the other side of the Kaiu Wall. He does what he can to ensure that their ire is aimed at the oni of the Shadowlands, instead of at the Lost. He hopes to show those samurai that the Spider, once revealed, are not the enemy they may appear to be, since they also fight against the great Oni Lords that threaten Rokugan.

Kyuden Suzume

The samurai of the Sparrow Clan are simple folk, for the most part, who do not concern themselves with excessive courtly behaviors. They are close allies with the Crane, however, and they understand there are certain things that are expected of them by the members of the Great Clan. Due to this, their small court is well appointed. In fact, the court and the guest quarters are maintained in a better and more luxurious fashion than any other part of the Sparrow lands, including the home of the Clan's daimyo.

Suzume Yugoki, the Sparrow daimyo, is rarely found in the courts of Kyuden Suzume unless he has a specific purpose there. Instead he leaves the normal concerns of the court to Suzume Chiaki. She showed Yugoki that she had the necessary graces and elegance to impress the visiting Crane, while still maintaining the practicality of the Sparrow.

Unbeknownst to the daimyo, however, Chiaki is loyal to the Spider, rather than the Sparrow, among whom she goes by the name Chuda Chiaki. She replaced the original Chiaki under orders from Daigotsu, and continues the charade as a method to keep tabs on the Crane. Her true nature is a well-guarded secret, even among the Spider. Few other than Daigotsu himself know that she is not just a Suzume who heard the dark call.

When the Crane (or any other visiting dignitary) come to Kyuden Suzume, it is Chiaki who greets them. She has also been known to invent reasons to invite representatives of the Clan to attend, with Yugoki remaining unaware. Chiaki will entertain them and ingratiate herself to them, while looking for any weakness or openings that the Spider can exploit. When the time seems appropriate, she will bring Yugoki to meet the visitors, ensuring that he does nothing to undo any of the meticulous planning and plotting she has undertaken. Yugoki's trust in her is absolute, likely more because he is glad to have someone to handle such duties than due to any insight into her character.

In addition to her duties at Kyuden Suzume, Chiaki uses her connections and contacts to acquire invitations to the various courts of the Crane. The original Chiaki trained at the Doji Courtier School, but the current Chiaki absorbed all of the unfortunate Suzume's memories, so she does not fear encountering any who knew the old Chiaki. In fact, she is happy to impress and amaze those who remember a quiet young girl and encounter a confident, impressive woman.

Chiaki does not try to subvert any of the Crane while in Crane lands. Instead she uses her time there to extend invitations to specific individuals to spend time with her in the lands of the Sparrow. She feels that separating her targets from their support network makes them more susceptible to her suggestions. For now, those suggestions only aim to open the minds of the Crane to the idea of aid from outside their normal avenues. Daigotsu has not yet gone so far as to offer Spider aid against the Crab, similar to what he offered the Unicorn, in fear that the Crab will uncover the true nature of the Spider if turned against them.

While among the Crane, Chiaki has detected the activities surrounding the Anvil of Despair. Rather than using this information to her benefit, Chiaki has done what she could to quell any rumors and hide these sordid activities. She sent this information back to Daigotsu, of course, but she feels that allowing the Crane to utilize the Anvil, rather than trying to reclaim it for the Spider's use, better serves Daigotsu's cause.

Kyuden Tonbo

The Spider are wary of the Lion and the Crab, due to those Clans' commitment to fighting against any signs of corruption, but they also have to keep their distance from the Dragon. This is not due to the temperaments of the Dragon samurai and monks, but rather due to a special item brought back from the Tomb of the Seven Thunders. The Jade Mirror remains in the Dragon's possession, under the protection of Togashi Ieshige. While an attempt to infiltrate the Dragon might be successful, if any Spider agents ever had occasion to be exposed to the Jade Mirror, their duplicity would be revealed. In addition, the mirror might not just show the agent's deception, but the true nature of the Spider as well. It is for this reason, and not any supposed mystical powers of the Dragon Champion, that the risk of exposure

is simply not worth the advantage gained by placing agents inside the Dragon borders.

This does not mean that Daigotsu has given up all thought of infiltration of the Dragon. It only means that he prefers that the Spider's observation of the Dragon be done at a safe distance. To this end, they have placed members of the Spider in the small court at Kyuden Tonbo. The court is not as active as the courts of the Great Clans, of course. It primarily acts as the gateway to the Dragon, as guests need to present themselves at the Dragonfly court before they are granted an audience with the Dragon.

The Spider have placed an agent among the Dragonfly in order to watch who approaches the Dragon. While they are unable to find out what is going on inside the Dragon lands, this way they can keep tabs on some of the interactions the Dragon have with other Clans and other supplicants. Their agent, Chuda Rintaro, is also tasked with trying to discover what the visitors wish to discuss with the Dragon and, in case the information exposes the Spider in any way, to dispose of the visitor before the Dragon are alerted. Daigotsu recognizes what a threat the Dragon would be to the Spider if they started using the Jade Mirror in a more liberal fashion, so it is his goal to keep them ignorant and fighting different threats, rather than risking them turning their full attention to the Spider. The Togashi family's war with the Order of the Spider is troublesome enough without the rest of the Clan getting involved.

When someone requests an audience with the Dragon, they first present their petition to the Dragonfly, who forward the request to the Dragon. This is generally a formality as the Dragon maintain a presence in Kyuden Tonbo for just this eventuality. The supplicant is not provided this information, though most are aware of it, thereby giving the Dragonfly a certain deniability when the request is refused by the Dragon.

Rintaro, who maintains the pretense of being a Tonbo, is not placed highly within the Clan, so he does not have the authority to demand to see all of these applicants. Neither does he have the ability to demand that he see them alone. Instead he volunteers for this duty as much as he can without seeming suspicious. Whenever he is placed in charge of receiving supplicants, he tries to question them under the guise of providing the Dragon with the best possible information. The specifics of their requests usually remain beyond Rintaro's

ability to ferret out, so Daigotsu's information out of Kyuden Tonbo is minimal.

Rintaro is ambitious and knows that the best way for him to impress the Dark Lord is to find a way to gather more and better information without violating the restrictions on his duties. To reach these ends he is striving to be the perfect Dragonfly samurai, in the hopes that he can rise to a position of greater power so he can impose his will on the functions of the Clan.

Nikesake

The Spider have a similar problem with the Phoenix that they do with the Dragon. While they wish to stay close to the Clan, in order to gain as much information as possible and subvert whenever the opportunity arises, there is a great risk in coming in too close contact with the Elemental Masters. Daigotsu has heard the tales that Shiba Ningen can look into a man's soul and know his deepest secrets. It would not do for someone with such an ability to get too close to one of the Spider. But also as with the Dragon, Daigotsu is not willing to abandon any thought of influence with the Phoenix. To solve this dilemma he has assigned one of his most loyal followers to Nikesake.

Nikesake is a Phoenix village and trade center, with strong commercial ties with the Crane, and the two Clans often use it as a place to meet and discuss issues which affect them both. It has no formal court, so these meetings usually take place in more informal settings, such as one of the many temples and shrines that fill the village. When Daigotsu broached the possibility of assigning one or more of the dark monks under his command to Nikesake, he was surprised to find that Roshungi himself asked for the task.

None of the Phoenix who live in or travel to Nikesake have any idea of the dangerous nature of the monk who tends to the temples they visit. He, or one of the few servants he has secreted in similar positions throughout the village, listens to every conversation held in these de facto courts and transmits all relevant information to the Dark Lord.

The Spider gain much valuable information using these methods, as the samurai and courtiers who use the temples for their meetings routinely disregard the monks who work in them. Monks, after all, are supposedly uninterested in such mundane things as trade agreements and transitory political alliances. Ironically,

these assumptions are completely correct. The Spider monks have no interest in these matters. They do, however, know how to follow orders, and Daigotsu has asked for a full report of all these meetings, whether they seem useful or not. Roshungi does not question the value of his reports. He leaves that to those back at Black Silk Castle.

Whether Roshungi realizes it or not, the information gathered in Nikesake has great value to Daigotsu's efforts. Each tiny piece of information can be used to help one of the other Clans, and it is through this aid that the Spider find their way into the confidences of Rokugan's Clans. The Spider are not able to use the situation in Nikesake for any other purpose, whether diplomatic or propaganda related, as Roshungi cannot represent the Spider directly without betraying his cover. He remains silent, interacting with the people of the village as little as possible. He despises them and knows that there is always a danger that his anger will overwhelm him, destroying the ruse the Spider have so carefully constructed. Thus, if the people of Nikesake do find out his true nature, it will be because he has finally lost control and decided to pull the whole village down around their ears.

Shutai

Trying to keep secrets in Scorpion lands has certain advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that acting in a suspicious and secretive manner is not uncommon in the cities and villages of the Scorpion. The fact that someone is keeping something secret is not unusual, as nearly everyone in these lands seems to be keeping secrets of one sort or another. The danger comes when a Scorpion decides that you seem interesting enough to try to discover what your secret is. No Clan is better at uncovering hidden truths than the Scorpion.

This is why the Spider choose to keep their main presence in Scorpion lands in the village of Shutai. Daigotsu feels that hiding among a village full of people who all have dark pasts and unsavory bearings and occupations will keep the Scorpion from taking too keen of an interest in their activities.

Shutai is full of ronin and bandits. It is said that it is the largest single gathering of bandits in Rokugan, yet those bandits working out of the village have remained untouched by the ferocity and vengeance of the Spider.

Once again, this is to keep unwanted Scorpion attentions away from them. If it seemed that the Spider were operating near Shutai, it is certain that the Scorpion would investigate.

The dark monk named Kishida maintains a temple in Shutai, though his connection to the Spider and Daigotsu remains unrevealed. Though ostensibly his task is to gather information and infiltrate the Scorpion if possible, Kishida has become more valuable as a conduit for information about the bandits themselves and their activities. While the Spider leave those working directly out of Shutai alone, Kishida uses the bandits to gather information about similar bands working elsewhere in Rokugan. The bandits are more than willing to comply, since they have noticed that when they pass information to Kishida, their competitors have a way of being dealt with severely. This is never discussed openly, as none of the bandits want to tempt fate and have Kishida's baleful gaze turned on them.

Kishida runs a small court of sorts in his temple in Shutai. He lets it be known that bandit leaders who have disputes are welcome to come to his temple to discuss and negotiate their problems between each other under a permanent flag of truce. The only price Kishida charges for this service is information and a token amount of opium, for appearances. Occasionally a Scorpion magistrate will approach Kishida to investigate this perverse service, but the Spider monk maintains a layered alibi for the Scorpion to uncover. He insists that he acts as peacemaker in order to better serve the cause of peace. He claims that helping the bandits in this fashion limits needless bloodshed and he feels bound by his oaths to help those who the magistrates would not help.

No Scorpion would take an explanation like this at face value, of course. The Scorpion by their nature are very unlikely to assume that altruism does not hide a deeper purpose. Kishida realizes that and has created a further layer of deception below that one. Any Scorpion who digs further finds out that Kishida has an extreme addiction to opium. He provides services to the bandits in the area in exchange for the drug. The bandits are more than willing to provide what Kishida needs, since he offers a service that would otherwise be unavailable, and opium is not in short supply.

The truth is that Kishida does not use opium. He simply maintains a supply, both to ensure that his deception is not uncovered and to use as a method of loosen-

ing tongues that are otherwise not pliable. Through this latter method he can also find out if anyone has tried to give him opium that is poisoned or otherwise dangerous. Anyone who tries to use opium to eliminate or otherwise endanger Kishida quickly finds that he is not someone to be trifled with.

Kishida goes into seclusion at regular intervals. The cover story maintains that this is when he partakes in the drug. This explains why he does not suffer from a lack of lucidity when dealing with the bandits or the Scorpion. In reality, he uses these times of seclusion to prepare his reports to be sent back to Black Silk Castle.

Toshi Ranbo

The Spider do not have an official presence in Toshi Ranbo. Neither do they have any agents permanently stationed there by the Dark Lord. This does not mean they have not started their attempt to occupy the Imperial City, just as they have any other part of Rokugan. This also does not mean there are no Shadowlands presences within Toshi Ranbo. Some of these even report to Daigotsu. They just do not do so under the umbrella of the Spider Clan.

The Spider have used the considerable resources of Daigotsu to purchase or start various business establishments in Toshi Ranbo. They have a covert presence in all quarters of the city, serving all classes of society. None of the proprietors of these businesses are aware of the nature of the benefactors who have provided them the finances needed to operate. The Spider have carefully chosen people motivated and blinded by greed. Their myopia keeps them from asking questions about the magnanimity of their benefactors. For the most part, these businessmen feel that a question not asked avoids unpleasant answers that could interfere with the collection of koku. If the Spider decide to expand their presence in Toshi Ranbo, they can easily move into these businesses, killing and replacing the proprietors if they seem unlikely to accept their new role.

The Spider have maneuvered themselves in such a fashion to try to take best advantage of the new regime once someone manages to claim the throne. They can make their presence known in whatever way is the most appropriate, having laid extensive groundwork. If it better suits them, they can also pull out of Toshi Ranbo altogether, with no one being any wiser about their holdings there.

The future of the Spider in Toshi Ranbo depends much on who is able to claim the title of Emperor, although of course this is also true of many other factions and Clans in the city and throughout the Empire. If Daigotsu has his way, the throne will either stay empty or be claimed by someone who knows that the next Hantei is a baby living in a dark castle in the heart of the Shinomen Forest.

Notable Spider NPCs

CHUDA RINTARO

Air: 3	Earth: 4	Fire: 2	Water: 3	Void: 4
Awareness: 4		Intelligence: 4		Perception: 5
Honor: 1.0		Status: 0	Glory: 4.0	Taint: 0

SCHOOL/RANK: Ronin Shugenja 4

SKILLS: Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Manipulation, Gossip) 5, Etiquette 4, Deceit 4, Kenjutsu (Wakizashi) 3, Meditation 4, Spellcraft 4, Theology (Fu Leng, Fortunes) 4, Shadowlands Lore 3, Storytelling (Poetry) 2.

ADVANTAGES: Allies (Goju protectors), Blackmail (4 Tonbo Tso), Irreproachable (2), Perceived Honor (4)

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Secret (Chuda), Insensitive

Rintaro was once a simple shugenja wandering the Empire shrine to shrine, praying to the Fortunes and making coin by healing the sick and tending the fields of the merchants of the Empire. One day in a simple shrine near the Dragon/Lion border, Rintaro discovered a very drunk magistrate of the Dragonfly, Tonbo Tso. The drunken samurai began to tell him intimate details of how his father, a ronin at the time, supposedly gave detailed information to the Lion generals as they marched on the Dragonfly lands. Tso swore fealty to the Dragonfly when Isawa Sezaru began rebuilding Kyuden Tonbo, attempting to repay his father's debt to the Minor Clan. Tso's shame was great, but the night's sake and the friendly face of Rintaro coaxed all the information out of the poor Tonbo. Rintaro took careful mental notes and soon copied it all down on several scrolls, burying them deep in his scroll satchel.

Years later, Rintaro found himself in the presence a skilled courtier; a courtier who had need of a skilled shugenja to tend to his failing health as he traveled the Empire. The money was good, the company better, and soon a friendship formed. The courtier began teaching Rintaro a more interesting outlook on the Empire and the courts. Soon, the aged courtier revealed himself to be a servant of Daigotsu, a member of the fallen Chuda family. Rintaro was brought to the Spider's lair deep in Shinomen Forest. With the protection of a jade finger, Rintaro was subjected to a very intense interview over several months, and attended the makeshift Spider Clan courts. His lack of Taint was deemed useful, and the skilled shugenja re-inserted himself into the Empire without raising any suspicions. Daigotsu had him shadowed with several Goju, watching and making sure Rintaro stayed protected.

Sometime later, Rintaro found his way back to the lands of the Dragonfly, and with the help of certain carefully-preserved scrolls, he soon found himself a safe spot in the Dragonfly courts, watching the mighty Dragon from afar.

Rintaro is an ambitious man and a loyal Spider, but he also suffers a growing fear deep inside of him. Working so close to the Dragon and their leader Togashi Satsu is a nerve-wracking experience, and even as he works to climb higher in the Dragonfly Clan's ranks, he worries that his secrets may be revealed. He would never reveal this fear to anyone, not even Daigotsu, but it lurks within him, a weakness he must continually fight.

CHUDA CHIAKI, A.K.A. SUZUME CHIAKI

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 3
Awareness: 5 Willpower: 4 Intelligence: 5 Perception: 5				
Honor: 1.5	Status: 4.0	Glory: 3.0	Taint: 5.0	

SCHOOL/RANK: Doji Courtier 5

SKILLS: Artisan 4, Calligraphy 4, Courtier (Manipulation) 4, Etiquette (Conversation) 4, Forgery 4, Know the School (Doji Courtier) 3, Lore: Superstition 4, Shadowlands Lore 3, Storytelling (Poetry) 2, Tea Ceremony 3.

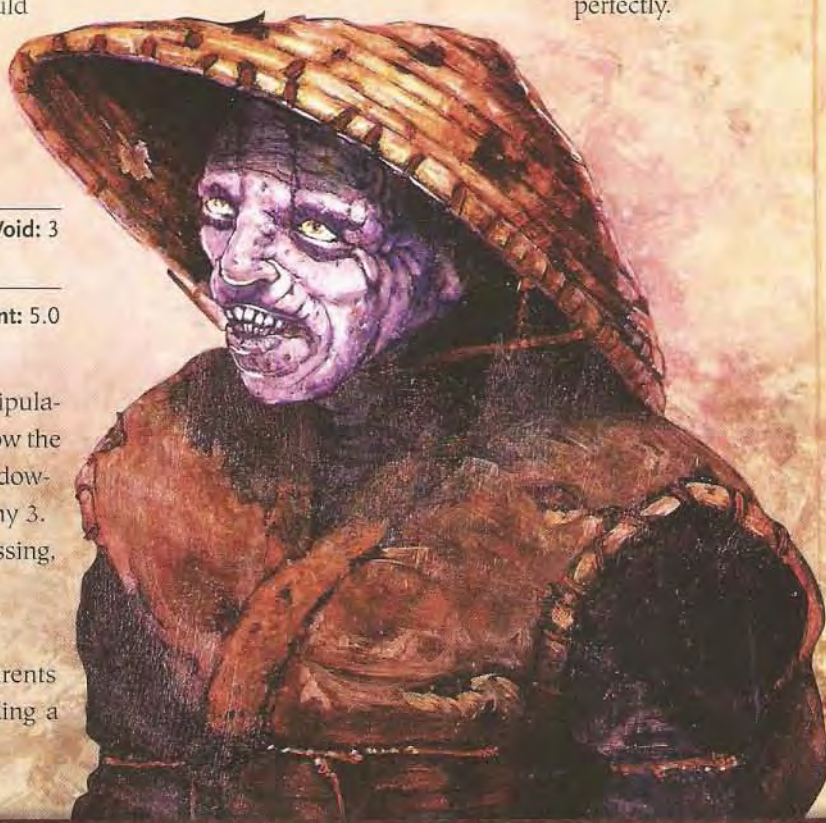
ADVANTAGES: Benten's Blessing, Fu Leng's Blessing, Perceived Honor (6)

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Secret (Rokuro-kubi)

Suzume Chiaki was a gifted young girl, her parents proud samurai of the Sparrow, her brother holding a

position in the Emerald Magistrates. She herself was honored to be invited by the Crane Clan Champion personally to attend the Doji Courtier School. Her work in that famed school was not exceptional, but she studied her lessons hard, blended in well, and passed her gempukku at the age of 14. Her parents and brother escorted her to the lands of the Monkey, where her first assignment would start, attending the Sparrow representative in the small court there. But things took a very terrible turn as they left the lands of the Crane. The small group was suddenly attacked, and young Chiaki fainted amid the terror of sudden violence. When she awoke, she and her brother were tied to a tree, and a hideous-looking woman was circling them with a jagged knife, while a dark-robed figure waited nearby. Chiaki wept, begging for her life, while her brother struggled against his bonds to no avail. The old woman slit her brother's throat, and as Chiaki watched his blood stain the earth, her mind sank into blackness.

Hours later, a Scorpion patrol found the young girl running along the road, weeping and covered in blood. They comforted her and investigated the scene, discovering what appeared to be the aftermath of a bandit attack. Only young Chiaki had escaped, it seemed, and she told a terrible story of running for her life while her brother fought to protect her. The Chuda had left the scene they wanted the Scorpion to find, and the deception worked perfectly.



The curse laid on Chiaki by the bog hag transformed her into that rarest of creatures, the rokuro-kubi, and over the years that followed the curse slowly ate away at what remained of her mind. By the time she was an adult, corruption had wholly consumed her, and when agents of the Spider Clan contacted her again, she gleefully accepted their offer. The seed they had planted had come to germination, and since then she has delighted in deceiving not only the Sparrow, but the Crane as well. Although she retains all the memories of her former life, she is in truth not even the same person.

DAIGOTSU KIRAZAI, A.K.A. MOSHIBARU KIRAZAI

Air: 3 Earth: 4 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 2
Strength: 4

Honor: 1.5 Status: 1.0 Glory: 1.0

SCHOOL/RANK: Ronin Warrior 2/Hida Bushi 1

SKILLS: Commerce 3, Courtier 3, Deceit 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Heavy Weapons 3, Hunting 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Kyujutsu 3, Shadowlands Lore 3, Stealth 2

ADVANTAGES: Large, Strength of the Earth (4), Voice

DISADVANTAGES: Brash, Dark Secret (Servant of Daigotsu), Missing Eye, Permanent Wound

Kirazai was never a little boy. From the time he was able to walk he was much larger than most children his age. His family were ronin, but they were proud and honorable, and Kirazai learned the way of the blade at his father's side. When he became a man he fought bravely alongside his father in dozens of small battles. Then came the War of the Rich Frog, and the great clash between the Lion, Dragon and Unicorn. Kirazai and his father were recruited to serve the Lion, and did so honorably, but the Golden Lion placed his ronin troops directly in the path of the charging Utaku Battle Maidens, and his father was slain right beside him. Kirazai flew into a rage, slaughtering every Battle Maiden in sight, and then walked from the battlefield, never to return to Lion lands.

After that, Kirazai could no longer live the life of an honorable wave-man, and he drifted into darker paths, eventually finding himself in the company of a bandit gang which preyed on Lion caravans traveling in and out of Crane lands. One night as they began to split up the goods after their latest raid, a strange group of samurai with an unknown mon approached the wrecked caravan. Without a word they attacked, slaughtering the

bandits without mercy. Kirazai fought back with all his strength, and in the end only he and a single Spider samurai-ko remained on their feet. Kirazai was surrounded by the corpses of other Spider samurai, and was ready to finish the job, but instead of pressing the attack, the remaining Spider began to talk to him. She spoke of a better way, a better life, a life where the arrogant Clans of the Empire would suffer and the rightful ruler, Daigotsu, would ascend the throne. It is not known whether Kirazai truly found this vision appealing or was merely tired of fighting. But whatever his motives, Kirazai soon found himself a member of the Spider Clan.

As the Spider began to infiltrate the Empire, Kirazai was given a special assignment, to work his way into the Crab Clan. The Crab were hosting one of their periodic Twenty Goblin Winters, offering fealty to those ronin who could bring back the heads of twenty bakemono. With the Spider Clan assisting him, Kirazai easily fulfilled this requirement, and he was offered membership in the vassal family of the Moshibaru.

Kirazai has served the Crab well, passing his training and making new friends and allies in their ranks. His service on the Kaiu Wall has not been without incident, however. During one unexpected Shadowlands raid, a mysterious explosion destroyed nearly all of Kirazai's squadron, severely wounding him. His left leg suffered burns that may never heal, and his right eye is now covered by a patch. However, the stoicism with which he endured these injuries only further impressed the Crab, and they have given him less demanding assignments, helping new recruits or working with the Yasuki away from the Wall. Kirazai continues to build his networks of friends within the Clan, working with the Yasuki courtiers as well as his fellow Moshibaru. All the while he waits for the time to receive orders from his true lord and enact his longed-for revenge on the Great Clans.

GOJU ZESHIN

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 2
Agility: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 1.0 Status: 2.0 Glory: 1.8

SCHOOL/RANK: Dark Whisper Courtier 3

SKILLS: Athletics 4, Commerce 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Deceit (Lying) 4, Defense 2, Etiquette 3, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Mantis 2, Lore: History 3, Lore: Lying Darkness 4, Peasant Weapons 3, Stealth 5

ADVANTAGES: Allies (numerous ronin)

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Secret (Spider Clan)

Goju Zeshin is a strange enigma even to his master, the Shadow Dragon. Zeshin was once a Tsuruchi samurai, working in the Mantis fleet alongside the renowned Storm Legions. But during the Dark Lord's attack on Ootosan Uchi, he fell in desperate combat. The young Tsuruchi awoke in the rubble, pinned beneath a dead oni, the Taint already seeping into his blood through the deep gash in his chest. He wished desperately to live, struggling to escape from beneath the monstrous corpse, and he heard a sinister whisper, a seductive call offering him freedom from the Taint if he would serve a new master. The Mantis was not as strong as his ancestors might have hoped. He broke down and begged for his life, giving in to the sinister Shadow Dragon.

The power of the Darkness masks his true identity, for his name today, Zeshin, is the name he gave himself at his rebirth into the Goju family. His was a character well suited to infiltration, and he underwent training with Chuda Mako, making him far more than the typical Goju spy or assassin. While once the call of the warrior drew him to battle, to defend his Clan's holdings and honor, now the Shadow Dragon and the Chuda Courtiers offered him a new path, one of power he couldn't imagine before. He was sent back to the Empire, assigned to learn the secrets of the Mantis Clan and to assemble many allies and favors, ready to wreck Daigotsu's wrath on the Children of Storms.

Daigotsu's agent have acquired the services of many ronin across the empire, and they employ Zeshin as one of their agents to negotiate prices for their services. To this end he has been placed in Kyuden Kumiko, suitably far from the main court of the Mantis but still within their territory. Zeshin has established his own peculiar "court" in the backroom of a local tea house, where he receives frequent visitors from the Mantis Clan, negotiating prices and services for the ronin he represents. Zeshin has developed many ears in the courts of the Mantis, and while other Spider operations against the Mantis Clan have been damaged by recent events, Zeshin's have not. Although he cannot enter the Mantis castles without being discovered, his power-base on the island is secure, and he patiently waits for the right time to strike. Soon, no doubt, the Shadow Dragon and the Dark Lord Daigotsu will allow him to fulfill his true purpose here, and the Mantis will suffer.

KISHIDA

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 3
Honor: 1.1		Status: 0		Glory: 2.7

SCHOOL/RANK: Temple of Venom Monk 3 (treat as Monk of Osano-Wo)

SKILLS: Athletics 2, Battle 2, Courtier 3, Defense 3, Etiquette 2, Jiu-jitsu 3, Meditation 3, Staves 3, Theology (Fu Leng) 3.

ADVANTAGES: Allies (various monks of Osano-Wo), Crab Hands, Fleet (2)

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Secret (Spider Clan agent), Idealistic, Overconfident

The background of Kishida is unknown, and none seem brave enough to ask the monk about his past. Kishida came into the service of Fu Leng shortly before the Lost left their city in the Shadowlands. His devotion in the Dark Kami is complete and would put most monks of Shinsei to shame. His brutal fighting style and cloth-wrapped face bring terror to those who face him in battle. Kishida never leaves anyone suffering in battle, always making sure to bring death to them in the name of the Dark Kami. The only hint to his past is that Kishida performs his duties in the Temple of Venom in a way very similar to those who worship the fortune Osano-Wo – if anyone with the appropriate knowledge were able to watch him.

Kishida never showed any interest in the teachings of Kokujin, for the mad Dragon seemed more bent on being a god himself rather than worshipping a true Kami. Kishida kept his distance, and soon after Kokujin's final defeat, he began pulling those devoted to Kokujin's teachings into the real Order of the Spider, the worship of Fu Leng.

Daigotsu charged both Kishida and Roshungi with entering the Empire and watching the Great Clans, infiltrating them where possible. He spent several hours explaining his plans, how each Clan would be watched and the Spider Clan would attempt to gain a foot hold or at least a proxy in each court. Both Kishida and Roshungi bowed to the Dark Lord's wisdom, accepting their tasks and returning to the Empire. After more discussion it was decided Kishida would enter the town of Shutai on the outskirts of Scorpion lands.

Kishida has developed an effective relationship with the bandits in Shutai, with a multi-layered cover story to protect himself from any inquisitive Scorpions. The

bandits in turn have learned to respect Kishida, not only because of his knack for bringing down retribution on their rivals but also because of his cruel fighting style, which several of them have witnessed first-hand. For now, the Clan of Secrets has no reason to suspect the monk in this small town. Kishida has been quite successful at developing information sources, and he continues to serve Daigotsu's plans without flaw.

ROSHUNGI

Air: 2	Earth: 4	Fire: 2	Water: 3	Void: 3
Reflexes: 3		Agility: 3		
Honor: 2.0	Status: 0	Glory: 3.1	Taint: 2.4	

SCHOOL/RANK: Temple of the 9th Kami Monk 3 (treat as Monk of Temple of the Thousand Fortunes)

SKILLS: Athletics 2, Courtier 3, Deceit 3, Jiu-jitsu 4, Lore: History 2, Meditation 2, Peasant Weapons 2, Staves 2, Stealth 2, Theology (Fu Leng) 3

ADVANTAGES: Hands of Stone, Quick, Precise Memory

DISADVANTAGES: Ascetic, Dark Secret (agent of Daigotsu), Meddler

SHADOWLANDS POWERS: Blackened Claws, Jade Sense

Roshungi was one of the first monks to join Daigotsu's forces deep in the Shadowlands, arriving at the Temple of the 9th Kami as soon as the last stone was laid. Rumor has it that Roshungi had been a monk in the service of the Bloodspeaker cultist who first created Daigotsu himself. Roshungi is a devoted servant of the Dark Kami, and consequently was a bitter rival with the Mad Dragon Kokujin, quarreling constantly with him over his insane quest for power. Each time Kokujin would grow too angry, Roshungi would disappear into the Temple, avoiding his wrath. The monk knew that Kokujin would eventually destroy himself, and saw no reason to risk his own life in a pointless confrontation.

After the creation of the Spider Clan, Daigotsu had a lengthy discussion with Roshungi and Kishida, discussing his plans for infiltrating the Empire. Roshungi chose as his assignment the small Phoenix village of Nikesake. The Dark Lord warned him of this assignment, as the Phoenix are known for their alertness to the spread of the Taint. Since Roshungi does carry Fu Leng's blessings, he has arranged to receive shipments of jade petal tea from Spider agents among the Yasuki. Roshungi must drink the tea, which he sees as a foul concoction, each day to prevent his blessings from showing. His assignment at Nikesake is to carefully watch the Phoenix and Crane communications, collecting every fragment of information he can.



Roshungi acts as a monk in the service of the local shrines. This was an easy assignment to attain, since the local temple keeper was happy to have a skilled monk to help tend to the gardens and meditation rooms. Roshungi does his work in silence, inwardly hating every second but performing his duties like a good and humble monk. His eyes and ears are constantly on those who would use the shrines to talk in private, and the Dark Lord has been well pleased with his success so far. Roshungi truly wants nothing more than to snap the necks of all those who follow these false gods, but he is obedient to the Dark Lord and waits patiently for the order to unleash true suffering on the Empire in the name of the Dark Kami.

DAIGOTSU MAISHA, A.K.A. MAISHA

Air: 3	Earth: 5	Fire: 2	Water: 3	Void: 2
Awareness: 4		Intelligence: 3		
Honor: 0.5	Status: 1.0	Glory: 1.5	Taint: 4.7	

SCHOOL/RANK: Bayushi Courtier 3

SKILLS: Acting (Disguise, Mimicry) 8, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 4, Deceit (Seduction) 5, Etiquette (Sincerity) 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Kenjutsu (Wakizashi) 2, Lore: History (Lion Clan) 3, Lore: Spider Clan 3, Stealth 4

ADVANTAGES: Blackmail (various bandits and samurai in the City of the Rich Frog), Fu Leng's Blessing, Great Potential (Deceit)

DISADVANTAGES: Coward, Dark Secret (Servant of Daigotsu), Driven (to become Chancellor of an Obsidian Court)

SHADOWLANDS POWERS: Minor Bound Kansen, Unholy Seduction

Maisha is something of a mystery, even to the Dark Lord himself. The origin of this loyal servant of the Spider, how she joined the Clan, and even her true gender is unknown, although at present she prefers the public identity of a properly dressed young woman. Daigotsu has proclaimed this individual his Master of Lies, a fitting title given that when Maisha wants to hide something, she does. It both pleases and slightly worries the Dark Lord to have someone so skilled at keeping their own secrets.

In order to serve the Dark Lord more effectively, Maisha attended the Bayushi Courtier school, and while she excelled in their methods, she eventually drew the unwelcome attention of several of the sensei there, forcing

her to exit the school hastily or risk exposure. In the months afterward, Maisha traveled across the Empire, making friends in many circles, ranging from bandits to court samurai. None of whom know her true identity or even her true face. She assisted Chuda Chiaki for a time in the Sparrow courts, but eventually Daigotsu gave her an assignment of her own, sending her to the City of the Rich Frog as one of several agents in that Lion city. Maisha has established a variety of connections with the samurai and ronin in the city, some legitimate, most illegitimate. She keeps a carefully diary of all her contacts, their personalities, resources, and enemies, and which false personas she has used to contact each one. At last count, Maisha has over a dozen different false personalities she can assume.

Maisha hasn't stepped foot in a court since her time among the Sparrow. Today she frequents tea and sake houses, and even geisha houses to work her contacts and collect information. She compiles full reports every day and sends them back to the Dark Lord every week. Although Maisha performs these labors willingly, her true goals are far higher – she dreams of serving in an Obsidian Court, as Chancellor to her Lord Daigotsu as Emperor.

DAIGOTSU SUSUMU

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 2	Water: 3	Void: 2
Willpower: 3		Intelligence: 3		
Honor: 0.5	Status: 1.5	Glory: 1.0		

SCHOOL/RANK: Voice of Daigotsu 2

SKILLS: Calligraphy 3, Courtier 4, Deceit 3, Etiquette 4, Games: Letters 2, Games: Shogi 2, Lore: Unicorn Clan 3, Meditation 1, Shadowlands Lore 3, Storytelling 3

ADVANTAGES: Blackmail (Utaku Katiro), Dangerous Beauty, Perceiver Honor (4)

DISADVANTAGES: Overconfident, Driven (to serve Daigotsu)

Daigotsu Susumu is one of the new breed of courtiers trained at the Voice of Daigotsu school, kept carefully free of the Taint so as to be able to infiltrate the Empire without risk. Susumu's parents were ronin, barely surviving without a lord to protect them or their young child, until they met Daigotsu's recruiting agents. The disgruntled ronin of the Empire were a perfect target for his efforts, and Susumu's parents soon embraced service to the Dark Lord, swearing fealty to the Daigotsu

family. Daigotsu was already planning the creation of the Spider Clan, and he ordered Susumu's family and many other such ronin recruits to remain in the Empire, well away from the City of the Lost, waiting for him to issue further commands. It was clear to Susumu and his parents that their new Lord had plans that didn't involve mindless zombies or monstrous oni, so they took precautions to keep Susumu Taint-free.

Susumu's sensei taught him the ways of the courtier in the back of a tea-house in an obscure village in Unicorn Lands. Here he learned the ways of Rokugani politics, the ways of manipulation, the methods of destroying a samurai's reputation and subverting his honor.

When he was ready, Daigotsu Susumu was sent out into the Empire, accompanied by a yojimbo, Daigotsu Gyoden. His orders were to find a Great Clan that would support the Spider, and move to seek their assistance. It took considerable effort, but after acquiring some tasty blackmail on a local magistrate named Utaku Katiro, Susumu was able to forge a modest military alliance with the Unicorn Clan and find a place in the court of Ide Tang. Susumu knows Tang is no fool, but with the Unicorn desperate for help against the Lion, they were willing to accept help from a source as dubious as the Spider. Susumu is thus one of the first agents of Daigotsu to be actually be openly invited to the court of a Great Clan, and the only one to be openly recognized as a representative of the Spider Clan. He is proud of this accomplishment and hopes to serve the Dark Lord even more ably in future.

MIYA RISA, HERALD OF THE DARK LORD

Air: 5	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 3
Strength: 4				

Honor: 1.1	Status: 5.0	Glory: 2.5	Taint: 4.6
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SCHOOL/RANK: Miya Herald 4

SKILLS: Athletics (Running) 4, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 3, Defense 3, Etiquette (Conversation) 4, Horsemanship 3, Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu (Horse Archery) 4, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Spider Clan 3, Meditation 2, Stealth 3, Theology (Fe Leng) 2

ADVANTAGES: Absolute Direction, Combat Reflexes, Way of the Land (Crab, Lion, Unicorn)

DISADVANTAGES: Dark Fate

SHADOWLANDS POWERS: Beside the Darkness, Unholy Vision

Years ago, the aging herald Miya Risa accompanied the Lion armies to the Battle of Oblivions Gate, to witness their deeds and report back to the Empire on the victory or defeat of the army. She fell that day, joining the Lion in their battle against the oni, and the Imperial histories record that she died as a hero, in service to the Empire and the Celestial Order. But in truth, her story did not end there. She survived her wounds, and awoke days later amid countless other Tainted samurai, men and women who did not know what to do now that they could not return to the Empire. These samurai became the followers of Daigotsu, the first settlers in the City of the Lost.

Miya Risa has undergone many changes since that time. The Taint has restored her youth, enhanced her strength, and now she moves with an unnatural catlike grace. When she met Daigotsu, she was hesitant at first, but soon she saw that he was unlike any of the other would-be lords of the Shadowlands before him. He was not some random destroyer, destined to fail because of his overconfidence in the mindless Horde; instead he had plans for the Empire itself, to restore the Lost to their place in Rokugan. Risa committed herself wholeheartedly to his service, and was soon appointed the Herald of the Dark Lord. She refused to assume Daigotsu's family name, however, claiming the Imperial Families have served both the Hantei and Toturi Dynasties and will now also serve the Daigotsu Dynasty. Now she rides through the Shadowlands atop unholy beasts, carrying the word of her Lord to every quarter.

Miya Risa was once a woman with a soft, caring nature, but this was utterly destroyed by the Taint. Now she is an arrogant and cruel woman, a skilled warrior as well as a herald, moving with unholy speed and striking viciously to cripple rather than kill. Although she retains the Miya name, she is as loyal and devoted to Daigotsu as any members of his own family, and would not hesitate to charge the Kaiu Wall itself if he ordered it.

New Mechanics

The following section presents new mechanical options for members of the Spider Clan, as well as sensei of the dojo that teach these techniques.

New Basic School: Dark Whisper Courtier (Courtier)

In order to further the Dark Lord's goal of infiltrating the Imperial courts, the Chuda family have developed the Dark Whisper School. The school is designed to offer its students the blessing and power of darkness without the need to actually become Tainted, thereby allowing them to operate in the Empire without easy detection. The Chuda accomplish this by binding a kansen into the body of the courtier, a process which does not actually Taint the courtier. Instead, the kansen slowly leaches the life away from its host, halving the courtier's life expectancy. In return, the nearly undetectable kansen helps its host, working in unison with him to carry out their evil plans.

The Dark Whisper school employs the advice of a bound kansen to enhance its followers' talents. Normally, it is extremely difficult to detect the presence of this evil spirit, although a shugenja who asks the correct questions of the local kami can realize there is something malign in the area and possibly even trace its location. If the kansen is ever unmasked and slain, the Dark Whisper courtier will lose access to his techniques until the Chuda bind a new kansen to him, so naturally all Dark Whisper students are careful to avoid offering the slightest hint that they are accompanied by an evil spirit.

Benefit: +1 Perception

Honor: 0.5

Skills: Courtier (Manipulation), Etiquette, Deceit (Lying), Tea Ceremony, any 3 Lore skills

Outfit: Wakizashi, tanto, courtly dress, kimono and sandals, traveling pack, 10 koku

Techniques

RANK 1: INSIDIOUS WHISPERS

The courtier can hear the whispers of his kansen, showing him how to prey on the weak and the fearful. After observing a target for 5 minutes, you may make an Opposed Roll of your Perception/Courtier against the target's Willpower/Etiquette. If you succeed, you learn up to 2 points of Disadvantages possessed by his target, plus an additional 2 points for every Raise you made. The kansen also whispers advice to you as you speak with others, granting you a bonus equal to your Perception to all of your Social Skill Rolls.

RANK 2: CRACKS IN THE WALL

The kansen has grown stronger, and its mere presence causes discord and strife. Any persons standing close to you (within a distance of 5' per your Dark Whisper School Rank) will find it difficult to be courteous and follow the proper rules of etiquette. They suffer a penalty to all Etiquette Skill Rolls they make equal to 5 x your Dark Whisper Courtier's School Rank. In addition, as long as your Taint Rank is no more than half of your Insight Rank, any Shadowlands Taint you possesses is extremely hard to detect: The touch of jade does not burn you, and methods of sensing Taint used against you require 2 Raises over the normal TN needed to discover it.

RANK 3: THE TOUCH OF DARKNESS

The kansen's whispers can draw out the negative impulses in others. If you speak with your target for at least 5 minutes, you can make an Opposed Willpower Roll against him. If you win, the target gains 1 of the following Disadvantages (your choice) for a period of time lasting 10 minutes x your Dark Whisper School Rank: Antisocial (2 points), Brash, Contrary, Frail Mind, Insensitive, Lechery (2 points), or Overconfident.

RANK 4: THE WEAK ARE MY STRENGTH

You can have the kansen detach itself and follow your enemies, spying on them. Not only does this allow the kansen to spy on the target, but the aura of bad etiquette created by the school's Rank 2 Technique accompanies the kansen, essentially centering it on the target. However, while the kansen is away performing this spying mission, you cannot use any of your School Techniques. Calling for the kansen to return requires 5 minutes of concentration and a Willpower/Meditation Roll against a TN of 20.

In addition, each hour the kansen is away, you must make a Raw Willpower Roll against a TN that starts at 5, and increases by 5 per hour. If you fail a roll, you suffer Wounds from the physical stress, 1 Wound point per hour that the kansen has been away from you.

RANK 5: SUBTLE AGGRESSION

You and the kansen have become literally of one mind, and the kansen can now cause far more malign effects on your enemies. If you send out the kansen to follow a target, you can make an Opposed Willpower

Roll against the target to allow the kansen to influence his actions. You must still make Willpower/Meditation Rolls for each hour the kansen is away, as per the Rank 4 Technique.

The kansen's influence can cause insomnia to the target (as per the spell Unblinking Eye; see *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Third Edition* core rule book, p. 270), inflict fear (as per the spell Fear; see *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Third Edition* core rule book, p. 270), or even subtly influence the target's actions (as per the spell Darkness Rising; see *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game Third Edition* core rule book, pp. 269-70 — except that the kansen can attempt to influence the target's behavior once every 10 minutes). You can choose to have the kansen use any or all of these supernatural effects. If any of these effects are magically dispelled, the kansen immediately returns to you.

New Basic School: Obsidian Blade Duelist (Bushi)

This school is a perversion of the dueling styles of the Empire, developed by a Lost samurai of unparalleled cruelty. Daigotsu was delighted with this samurai's fighting style, which punished foes before being finishing them off. The Dark Lord encouraged this, since the Spider would need duelists to operate in the Empire, and the style drew on the virtues of strength and willpower which he favored. He ordered Daigotsu Kurozen to create a school to teach his methods to others, and the new dojo now echoes with screams and cries of anguish as Kurozen molds his students into brutal killing machines. The number of graduates — or rather, survivors — is still relatively low, but each shows potential that makes Kurozen smile.

The Obsidian Blade duelist is taught to employ cruelty and mockery as his principle weapons, unsettling and disrupting his opponent's focus and energy, and distracting them with their own pain and misery.

Benefit: +1 Strength

Honor: 1.0

Skills: Deceit (Intimidation), Defense, Hunting, Iai-jutsu, Kenjutsu (any Emphasis), any one Bugei or Low Skill

Outfit: Katana, Wakizashi, any one weapon, Kimono and Sandals, Light Armor, Travel Pack, 3 koku

Daigotsu Kurozen, Sensei of the Obsidian Blade Dojo

Not even the Dark Lord knows where Kurozen came from. His background is very unclear and his age is unknown. All that is certain about him is his twisted cruelty. Kurozen did not catch the Dark Lord's attention until the Spider Clan began to infiltrate into the Empire. He was an anonymous ronin, hired as a mercenary to assist the Spider Clan's operations. The Dark Lord personally saw Kurozen torture and defeat three other ronin with his mockery and cruel fighting style. Impressed, Daigotsu summoned Kurozen to a private meeting, but what happened there remains uncertain. Some among the Spider believe Daigotsu and Kurozen dueled for several hours, going toe-to-toe until the Dark Lord finally bested the ronin. Others believe Kurozen actually bested the Dark Lord. Regardless, what is known with certainty is that after many hours Kurozen departed Daigotsu's presence, bearing the Dark Lord's family name and a new daisho, the blades so black they appear to be carved from the purest obsidian.

Although scores of Spider samurai attend the Obsidian Blade dojo, only a few survive — those who share the same cruelty and strength as their sensei. Kurozen dresses in a simple kimono in the dojo, but wears elaborate and terrifying armor in battle. However, but he does not wear a helmet or mempo, since it obstructs his ability to scream bitter mockery at those who face his blades.

Techniques

RANK 1: STRENGTH

The Obsidian Duelist is taught to rely on his strength and physical power to overwhelm his opponents. When you are in a duel, before the opponent chooses which Trait you will use for the duel, you can substitute your Strength score for either your Reflexes, your Agility, or your Void. When fighting in a skirmish, you may make Knockdown attempts for only 2 Raises instead of 3. Finally, you gain a bonus equal to your Willpower to your Initiative Rolls.

RANK 2: INSIGHT

The Obsidian Duelists are taught to feed on their opponents' pain to enhance the force of their own blows. When attacking an opponent, you gain a Free Raise for every 2 Wound Levels he has already suffered. When focusing in a duel, you gain a bonus equal to your Deceit Skill Ranks to tall Focus Rolls you make.

RANK 3: DETERMINATION

The Obsidian Duelist has learned to deliver exceptionally vicious wounds that do not easily close. Any opponent struck by you continues to bleed from the injury. At the beginning of each round after you successfully inflict damage on opponent, he suffers a number of additional Wounds equal to your Strength. This effect continues until he is magically healed or successfully treated with a Medicine Skill Roll. You gain 1 additional attack per round.

RANK 4: CONTROL AND WILL

The Duelist's monstrous ferocity unnerves his opponents. Immediately after making a successful attack against an opponent, you may spend a Void Point to inflict a Fear effect on all enemies within 20', with the strength of the Fear being equal to your Strength. Additionally, you gain a bonus equal to twice your Deceit Skill Rank to the total of your Focus Rolls in duels. This replaces the bonus gained from the Rank 2 Technique.

RANK 5: KNOWLEDGE AND PERFECTION

The Obsidian Duelist has now attained full mastery of himself and can impose that mastery on his opponents. When you are in a duel, after an opponent selects which Trait you will use, you may immediately attempt a Contested Roll pitting your Willpower/Deceit (Intimidation) against his Raw Willpower. If you succeed, you may use your Strength as your dueling Trait, regardless of what score the opponent selected. Also, you may Focus a number of additional times beyond the normal limit equal to your Water Ring. Finally, you gain a bonus equal to twice your Willpower to your Initiative Rolls. This replaces the benefit from the Rank 1 Technique.



Chuda Mako, Sensei of the Dark Whisper Dojo

Chuda Mako's appearance is deceptively innocent. She seems to be a young girl, and dresses in simple long-sleeved brown robes, with a matching strip of cloth encircling her head like a blindfold, concealing her eyes. Those students who assume they can take advantage of their young sensei's blindness do not survive for long; though her eyes are gone, the Master Sensei of the Dark Whisper Dojo is far from helpless. She can instinctively sense the presence and emotions of others, and does not hesitate to exploit that ability to the fullest.

Before she joined the Spider, Mako was a ronin, surviving in the Empire by taking what pity and help she could from the monks she met during her wanderings. It was a monk of the Spider – a man named Kishida – who recognized the girl's darker potential and brought her to the Spider's lair in the Shinomen Forest. There, she came under the wing of Daigotsu Usharo, who believed the girl's talent might be turned towards the ways of the court, of deceit and manipulation. It did not take long for the young girl to fall in love with Usharo, though his feelings toward her remained strictly professional. When the older courtier was called away on a mission, Mako remained behind and vowed that when he returned, he would be proud of everything she had accomplished. She threw herself into her training and soon developed the basis for the Dark Whisper Courtier School. Now, as her first students make their way into the Empire, she continues to obsessively refine her teachings, and dreams of her love's praise and affection.

New Advanced School: Obsidian Magistrate (Bushu)

The Spider Clan attempts to spread its influence in part by punishing bandits and other criminals, creating goodwill and allies among the common folk. The Clan also vigorously polices its own members, punishing those who violate the commands of the Dark Lord. To support these tasks, Daigotsu has created a new office of so-called "Obsidian Magistrates" whose task is

to act as the enforcers of his will. Thus far, the school has only a few members, but as the Spider Clan's influence spreads, the numbers of Obsidian Magistrates will doubtless grow.

Requirements:

Rings/Traits: Intelligence 4, Earth 4

Skills: Deceit 5, Anatomy 5

Other: Only members of the Spider Clan with at least one Rank of Taint may take this School.

Techniques

RANK 1: THE PRICE OF WEAKNESS

The Obsidian Magistrate is trained to exploit the weakness of others for the benefit of the Spider Clan. You may assess a victim by observing them for one round and making a Perception/Anatomy Roll against a TN of 20. A success awards you one of the following pieces of information, plus one additional piece of information for each successful Raise: the Rank of one of the target's Physical Traits, what Wound Level the target is currently at, or any physical Disadvantage the target has. When questioning someone, you gain a bonus equal to your Anatomy Skill Rank to your Investigation (Interrogation) Skill Rolls.

RANK 2: THE FACE OF FEAR

The Obsidian Magistrates are terrifying opponents, able to dominate those around them with their cruel methods and cold-hearted efficiency. You may make take a Simple Action to make an Opposed Willpower/Deceit Roll against a target's Willpower/Etiquette to dominate them with your aura of fear. If you succeed, you gain a Fear rating equal to your Willpower. The target and all of his allies (if any) must immediately roll against this Fear effect, and the specific target of this Technique suffers a -10 penalty to the roll. You gain 1 additional attack per round.

RANK 3: OBSIDIAN HEART

Obsidian Magistrates eagerly punish those who break the rules of Lord Daigotsu or who do not give up their secrets. You can inflict debilitating pain on others, either during questioning or in combat. When interrogating someone using the Anatomy (Torture) Skill, you may call up to 5 Raises. For each successful Raise called, your victim suffers a -5 penalty to his next roll during the interrogation.

In a skirmish, you may spend a Void point and sacrifice 1 attack that round in order to deliver this effect through a melee attack. Instead of attacking normally, you make a Willpower/Anatomy (Torture) Skill Roll against the opponent's TN to Be Hit to inflict the same TN penalties on that target's next roll during the skirmish.

You also gain a bonus equal to your Intelligence to the total of all Anatomy Skill Rolls, including those made for School Techniques. You now gain a bonus equal to twice your Anatomy Skill Rank to all Investigation (Interrogation) Skill Rolls. This replaces the benefit from the Rank 1 Technique.

Goju Kokuei, Sensei of the Obsidian Magistrate Dojo

If the Shadow Dragon did not wish otherwise, Goju Kokuei would already have risen to the position of Obsidian Champion. It is almost universally admitted within the Spider Clan that she could take the position easily should she ever wish, given her overwhelming strength and skill. However, the Shadow Dragon has instead made an arrangement with Daigotsu for her to act as the head sensei of the newly formed Obsidian Magistrate school. Apparently, the Dragon prefers to see his minions in less prominent positions, perhaps as insurance should the Spider's secrets become known to the Empire at large.

Kokuei is a cruel mistress to her students. She appears to be little more than a form of veiled shadow, vaguely feminine in outline, made out of the darkest smoke. The shades of swirling grays occasionally give the impression of a woman in her prime, but looking upon her for long is difficult and unsettling. Still, there is something hypnotically compelling about her, and she uses this to her full advantage.

Students who submit themselves to the sadistic punishment that is Kokuei's training come out of it no longer able to fear anything but the pain she would inflict if they fail their Clan.



New Advantage: Fu Leng's Blessing (10 points, 7 for Spider or Lost) [Granted]

Rolls intended to detect your Taint via mystical means suffer a penalty equal to $5 \times$ your Insight Rank. If there was no TN before, the person attempting to detect the Taint must now make a Raw Perception Roll against a TN of $5 \times$ your Insight Rank. If you touch jade or are targeted by jade magic, you may make a Raw Willpower roll against a TN equal to $5 \times$ your Taint Rank, and if you succeed, the jade shows no visible outward signs of harming you (it still inflicts damage normally, but you show no outward pain, scarring, or other symptoms). This Advantage does not help hide any obvious deformities such as those caused by Shadowlands Powers.

New Shadowlands Power: Minor Kansen Bound (Minor Power)

A minor kansen has been bound to you and grants you its unholy guidance. The kansen observes all around it, protecting itself first and you second. Due to its unnatural perceptiveness, you gain a Free Raise on all Perception Trait Rolls. However, jade-based spells (such as Jade Strike or Tomb of Jade) gain a DR bonus equal to the caster's Insight Rank when they inflict damage on you.

New Shadowlands Power: Unholy Seduction (Minor Power)

Your Taint has altered your body, making you unnaturally alluring to those around you. Members of the opposite sex are drawn to you, although they aren't sure why. You gain a +2k0 bonus to Deceit (Seduction) Rolls made against someone of the opposite gender.



MASTERS OF COURT

THE
OTOMO FAMILY

The Clans of the Crane, Scorpion, and Spider are not the only masters of courtly intrigue, politics, manipulation, and diplomacy in the Empire. The Otomo family, leading light of the three Imperial Families, has also been a master of the political arena for countless centuries, and continues to play a vital role in the Imperial courts today.

The Role of the Otomo Family

To understand the Otomo, one must understand their political origins. This does not refer to the original founding of the Otomo family, but rather, to the time when the Otomo family came into the fullness of its power under the Hantei Dynasty. It was by the decree of Hantei Yugozohime, Hantei VII, that the Otomo family's true role was born.

Though the family had existed for centuries prior to the fall of the first Gozoku conspiracy and Yugozohime's ascension to the throne, up until this time it had been little more than a repository for the non-inheriting members of the Imperial line. After the new Empress disbanded the Gozoku power structure, however, she conferred many of its political duties and offices upon the Otomo. Perhaps more importantly, she also ordained them to carry out a secret, rarely revealed duty:

to forever serve as an instigator of conflict between the Clans, keeping them divided and in perpetual rivalry so that they would ever again be able to defy Imperial authority.

The Otomo family has survived through a thousand years and has already outlasted one great change in Imperial dynasties, and will likely outlast the next one as well. Despite the replacement of the Hantei Dynasty with the Toturi, all of the Imperial Families retained their original purpose, and they are working hard to ensure that whoever becomes Emperor at the end of the current crisis will likewise retain all three Families in their traditional roles. Where the Seppun see themselves as defenders of the honor and lives of the Emperor's family, and the Miya see themselves as proclaiming the Emperor's word and enacting his will, the Otomo view themselves as the ultimate defenders of his power and his throne, no matter what name the Heavens might ordain hold the office.

In truth, the vast majority of individual Otomo are unaware of the true and somewhat sinister nature of Hantei Yugozohime's divine charge to their family. Only those within the upper echelons of the Otomo are fully aware of this duty, and the secret is kept closely guarded. Yet such secrecy is, ultimately, almost unneeded. All members of the family have long since implicitly accepted the notion that the Emperor's power, prestige, and divine mandate are best protected by lessening of the power of those Clans who have grown too strong, while strengthening those who have fallen too low.

Where many of the Great Clans see the courts as a battleground, for the Otomo, they are home. The Otomo, far more than any family of the Great Clans (even the courtly Doji and Bayushi), exist primarily within the Imperial Court and see themselves as responsible for its oversight. To the Otomo, the Clans are unruly and often dangerous children, incapable of properly wielding the power they are granted. Correspondingly, the Otomo see themselves as parents, and like all parents, their work is usually under-appreciated by the children.

The Emperor rules by divine right, and the leaders of the Otomo see themselves as the throne's servants by that same divine right. To them, upholding and bolstering Imperial authority is not merely a family task but a holy duty, ranking alongside the Phoenix quest for spiritual knowledge, the Dragon and their path of enlightenment, or the Kitsu family's devotion to the ancestors. By upholding the Celestial Order and ensuring that the squabbling Clans never develop undue levels of power, the Otomo protect the people from all manner of evils, and they even claim some of the credit for the defeat of such vicious and dangerous individuals as Bayushi Atsuki, the leader of the reborn Gozoku conspiracy. Today, with the Clans at each others' throats over who should claim the now-vacant throne, the Otomo family's political balancing act has become more difficult and, in their view, more vital than ever.

The Otomo can access almost un-measurable resources in the pursuit of their duty. Their social status is far above that of the average Clan diplomat, and even a normal Otomo can demand the respect of significant political figures like district governors. They have access to all courts within the Empire, and cannot be easily denied entrance even in war-embroiled areas. Most Otomo diplomats also make a practice of accumulating favors, for their position and influence makes them well-suited to helping others with all manner of difficulties, both large and mundane. Indeed, the typical experienced Otomo will have a vast store of favors and allies ready to hand, enough to make even a veteran Doji courtier envious. The Otomo also have access to great wealth, not to mention the general acknowledgment of their divinely protected privilege as the Emperor's personal servants, upheld through two dynasties.

Otomo diplomats and courtiers are exceptionally well-trained in effective utilization of these formidable resources. As a result, they often come off as demand-

ing, pushy, domineering, aggressive, and presumptuous. However, this is exactly what the Clans expect of them, and thus is not truly a weakness. Further, with their almost innate grasp of courtly politics and their access to every court in the empire, the Otomo can choose when and where to bring their full strength to bear, when to be cautious and use finesse, and when to deliver the weight of Imperial power and displeasure like a Crab's dai tsuchi.

Despite their outward arrogance, the Otomo family's upper echelons do recognize a troubling reality in the existence and authority of the Imperial Families, the Otomo family in particular. Their power rests only with the throne and with its acceptance. Should there ever come a time in which the throne denied them their privilege, or a new dynasty is founded in which they were excluded by the Emperor's command or, worse, by the divine mandate of Tengoku, all of the power and prestige they have wielded for so many long centuries could evaporate almost overnight.



Therefore, they work constantly to ensure that their presence is never forgotten and their value to the Clans and to the throne itself is never underestimated, laboring at this task with the same over-protective parental tenacity as they use to control and manipulate the Clans. Such is the burden on the Otomo during these uncertain and confused times, as the Empire struggles to decide on a new dynasty.

The relentless pursuit of the family's mission and duty, through every sort of crisis, has created an almost tragically entrenched public role for the Otomo within the Empire. They have become eternal antagonists of all other political entities within the Empire, even at times the other Imperial Families. And yet, by the very nature of the position that they have placed themselves in since the edicts of Hantei Yugo-zohime, they are an absolutely necessary evil. The Empire cannot operate effectively without their presence, and all of the Clans are grudgingly aware of this. It is rare for any of the Great Clans to truly and personally respect or appreciate the presence and involvement of the Otomo in their individual affairs, but all of the Clans know that they need the Imperial Bureaucracy, without which neither samurai nor common people can maintain the complex, overarching legal structure of Rokugan. Some Clans, such as the Crane, try to work with the Otomo, while others such as the Scorpion seek to work around them. But all of the Clans must deal with them, one way or the other.

No Otomo would ever say these unpleasant realities aloud, in public or private. Indeed, few in the family are so cynically jaded as to recognize the reality that their family has simply clung to its own power for most of the last thousand years. Instead, they hold to their claim that the Otomo have their power by divine mandate, and until Tengoku itself says otherwise, not the Imperial Families, the Great Clans, the Minor Clans, or even the Emperor will oppose this. The Otomo family leadership hope this will continue indefinitely, and promise themselves they seek this not just for themselves but for the sake of the Empire. Individual Otomo daimyo may come and go, but the Otomo themselves have become all but synonymous with the political nature and structure of the Empire of Rokugan.

The Otomo Family's Political Strategies

The Otomo traditionally work in court through a mixture of traditional methods on the Crane model – exchanging favors, accumulating allies, making valuable marriages, and so forth – but supplemented with a more direct, bullying approach that overwhelms their political opponents with their superior social status. Indeed, many Otomo are taught to literally stun their enemies with a powerful invocation of the Emperor's name and power, a technique known as *obiesaseru*. Even without such methods, however, the Otomo are known for crushing their rivals with direct political attacks, using their position as the Emperor's servants to force their enemies to admit error and apologize. Small wonder that most courtiers, confronted by an approaching Otomo in a corridor or garden, start looking for the nearest escape route.

The Crab Clan

So long as the Crab keep their weapons pointed towards the Shadowlands, the Otomo almost never even think about them. In fact, the Otomo would much prefer not to bother with the Crab at all, a choice which the Crab regard as a mutually beneficial relationship. The Crab and Otomo both share a common goal, after all, in the defense of the Empire. Sadly, this is almost the only thing they share, but as long as the Crab behave themselves, the Otomo are happy to leave them alone. However, as soon as their weapons are pointed at anything but the enemy to the south, the Otomo are swift to remember that Crab bluster is backed by one of the most powerful military machines in all of Rokugan.

Otomo political tactics with the Crab generally involve drawing the Clan's samurai out of their shell as much as possible. On their own lands, the Crab can often call upon their duties to effectively curb political attacks. More than one courtier unfortunate enough to be assigned to a Crab castle has found his requests and petitions continually turned aside by reports of the latest Shadowlands raid on the Kaiu Wall. Therefore, when it is time to confront the Crab, the Otomo invite

their diplomats to lands that are either neutral or under the Imperials' own sway. By interacting there, where the Crab cannot directly call upon their military strength and duty, the Otomo are usually able to bring their full political weight to bear. At that point, political interaction is generally very straightforward, and always favors the far more powerful courtiers of the Otomo.

The Crane Clan

The Crane are one of the two Clans in the Empire that the Otomo watch most closely. They are extremely capable politicians, with a system of gifts and favors available to them comparable to or possibly even greater than the Otomo's own. They have vast wealth, skilled artisans, and even a military considerably more capable than it is sometimes credited. Within the court, their resources and their networks of alliances with the other Clans make them very difficult to counter.

The Otomo response to the Crane for many years has been that of friendship. Since the Crane generally operate through the building of alliances and the owing of favors, and the Otomo have opted over time to employ a very similar system. They are always willing to offer the Crane favors, and generally act in concert with the Crane in the courts whenever possible. This offers the Crane the image of being beloved by the Emperor, a potent political position, and places the Crane in debt with the Otomo, offering the Imperials the leverage they require. Since the fall of Otosan Uchi, unfortunately, the balance of debt has often gone the other way, as the Crane have repeatedly offered their wealth and assets to help the Otomo rebuild their strongholds. Now that their position is more secure, the Otomo hope to quickly restore their more traditional superior position in their relations to the Crane.

The key to Otomo strategy with the Crane has always been timing and subterfuge. The Crane are natural alliance builders, preferring to assemble coalitions of support behind their every move, and this tendency to push for harmony between the Clans is a threat to the Otomo family's traditional goal of conflict. However, most of the time the Crane Clan's power bolsters the throne, making them useful allies in upholding its prestige and integrity. To balance these two factors, the Otomo generally observe and wait, building up leverage on the Crane even as they publicly remain wholly in their favor. So long as the Crane's behavior does not conflict

with their goals, they do not oppose them. But when the resplendent Clan exceeds its authority or grows too strong, the Otomo cut apart the Crane's networks of alliances with careful behind-the-scenes manipulation, or redirect its attentions to political rivals where it can waste its resources.

Recently, the Empire's new dynastic struggle further complicated the Otomo-Crane relationship when the Crane decided to endorse Otomo Hoketuhime as a candidate to hold the Steel Throne. Although making their own daimyo Emperor appeals to the senior ranks of the Otomo, they are a bit uneasy at being placed once more back into the debt of the Crane Clan.

The Dragon Clan

At first glance, one might believe that the Otomo would get along well with the subtle, enigmatic Dragon Clan, which has few ambitions and seldom emerges for long from its mountain fastnesses. However, this is not always the case, due mainly to the two factions' differing views on truth. The Otomo embrace truth which is perceived within the bounds of Rokugani culture and bushido, driven by the sincerity that proves the weight of one's words as fully as if Heaven itself had spoken. The Kitsuki, and to a certain extent the rest of the Dragon Clan, often seek instead a truth which is empirical in nature, based upon evidence and facts. The two could not be more different.

To the Otomo, the Kitsuki Method is not only offensive, but also extremely problematic. Many of the webs of contacts, influence, and power which the Otomo rely on are based upon the falsehoods, manipulated perceptions, and half-truths inherent within the courtly principles of sincerity and courtesy. More than almost any other courtiers, the Otomo understand that politics means falsehood, and the virtue of honesty must give way to other virtues in the courts. The Kitsuki, with their peculiar attachment to absolute truth, often disrupt and even destroy these carefully tended layers of deceit, and for the Otomo this is unacceptable. In this regard, the Otomo are little different from the Scorpion, although they would be gravely offended at such a suggestion.

Where the Otomo find themselves in conflict with the Kitsuki, they react consistently and aggressively. They stress traditional forms of courtly interaction, emphasize the importance of Rokugani law and its rules of evi-

dence, and bring to bear the full weight of their favors and contacts within the Doji magistrates. By hammering relentlessly on conventional protocols, they choose the playing field and keep the Dragon influence under control.

The Lion Clan

One of the Clans which receives the most consistent respect from the Otomo is the Lion. While on some occasions the Right Hand's political and military alliances have caused a certain concern among the Otomo, forcing them to sow seeds of discord among such allies, it is rarely the Lion themselves who are the target of such attacks. There is a simple reason for this behavior. The Lion ferociously and relentlessly support and back the throne itself, always in principle and usually in fact. This makes them extremely useful to the Otomo goal of upholding Imperial power and, coincidentally, their own power.

The Otomo see the Lion as being completely centered on the support and defense of the throne. Even should an Emperor be personally unpopular with the Lion, their rigid views of the Celestial Order cause them to

obey without question. Even when the last Hantei Emperor was known to be possessed by Fu Leng, at least half the Lion Clan remained completely loyal, unable to contemplate treason against the throne.

But while the Lion will not oppose the throne, they are quite willing to wage war upon other Clans, whether for slights old or new, or simply to test their armies or try to expand their territory. This makes them very useful for the Otomo goal of promoting conflict between the Clans, and they tend to view the Lion as a sword ready to their hand.

The Otomo use their position and influence as the Emperor's servants to manipulate the Lion, either as individuals or as a Clan. The brash and bold Lion can seldom resist an appeal based in Imperial authority, and the Otomo routinely exploit this to turn the Lion against other factions who might be gaining too much strength. This does sometimes cause a certain displeasure among the more politically sophisticated Lion, who can recognize when their Clan is being manipulated like a tool rather than treated with the respect it is due. But the Lion Clan as a whole remains eternally willing to serve the throne and the Otomo.



The Mantis Clan

Since the Mantis rose to Great Clan status they have been the focus of considerable attention from the Otomo. The Mantis are aggressive and ambitious, much like the man who led them to their glory as a Great Clan, Yoritomo. In the Otomo's minds, the children of the storm are a power quite likely to ally with other Clans, threatening another Gozoku or similar conspiracy. The Otomo do not fail to notice that the Mantis supported the Khan's aggressive march on the Imperial capital during the Winter of Red Snow. Furthermore, the Mantis Clan's island home and great wealth tends to make the Clan somewhat isolated from the traditional Otomo power base, which deeply irritates the Imperials.

Most Otomo political responses to the Mantis center on forcing them out of their traditional power base, much like dealing with the Crab. The Otomo rarely interact with the Yoritomo on the islands, but rather force all negotiations to be on the mainland, preferably in prominent, prestigious courts where the full weight of traditional court etiquette can crush the Mantis' unconventional attitudes. In such places, the Otomo can exert their status and contacts easily, forcing the Mantis to comply with their dictates.

The other major concern for the Otomo regarding the Mantis is their gaijin connection. The presence of men like Rama Singh reveals the real threat that in the future a foreign power may assault the Empire, something which has not happened since the ancient battle of White Stag. The mere possibility of the Mantis allying with a gaijin power, or receiving aid from such unknown sources for a bid to power, horrifies the Otomo. They observe the Mantis Clan's activities with great care, still unsure how to respond to this ominous possibility.

The Phoenix Clan

Generally, the only aspect of the Phoenix Clan which enters the Otomo family's considerations is the Elemental Council. Its power, like that of the Kitsuki, derives from a source which the Otomo do not truly understand or trust: in this case, the kami. The vast power and strange nature of the kami makes the Elemental Council a politically powerful but often appallingly unpredictable player, a fact highlighted by their unexpected intervention at the end of the Winter of Red Snow. Aside from the Council, however, the Phoenix Clan's political power has rarely been significant, and they have usually been seen as too pacifist to be a threat to the throne. The time of the Gozoku was an exception, of course, and one the Otomo have not wholly forgotten.



So long as the Phoenix keep their influence to spiritual matters, the Otomo are willing to leave them unmolested. When they step out of line, traditional lines of authority are stressed, pointing out their duty to the Imperial throne, and seeking to limit their influence as much as possible. However, given the immense potential power of the Elemental Council, this is usually done in a highly respectful manner. Thus, while antagonism is the usual response of the Otomo to the Kitsuki, they generally prefer placation when dealing with the Elemental Council. The Isawa are always treated with honor and the Otomo make a show of heeding their words, at least in public. Usually, such well-played token respect to the Council is enough to placate its prickly pride. The recent Phoenix intervention in the Imperial capital, Toshi Ranbo, forced a partial reassessment of this strategy, but with the subsequent withdrawal of the Dragon of the Fire and the return of the Lion to the city, the Otomo feel confident that their relations with the Isawa are moving back to familiar ground once more.

The Scorpion Clan

Along with the Crane, the Scorpion are the Otomo family's greatest concern in the courts, and unlike the Crane, they cannot be relied on as friends. Though the Underhand is, in principle, as much a servant of the throne as the Lion or the Otomo themselves, the Otomo believe the Scorpion are dangerously prone to becoming drunk on their own power and their vast trove of secrets. The Scorpion Clan Coup, in the Otomo view, was not a misguided act of honor but one of raw ambition, and the Scorpion cannot be trusted not to try the same thing again. Thus, it is quite rare for the Otomo to truly favor the Clan of Secrets.

The Otomo family's greatest asset against the Scorpion has always been perception. The Scorpion rely upon their masks, controlling the perceptions of others. The Otomo continually attempt to remold that perception into a form damaging to the Scorpion. They always carefully observe the Scorpion Clan's interactions in court, and make heavy use of gossip and aggressive political maneuvering to paint the Scorpion in the worst possible way. In this regard, they rely heavily on their own courtly spies, the order known as the Otomo Infiltrators, who are particularly adept at ferreting out other Clans' intentions and goals.

If the Otomo can manage to maneuver the Scorpion into an undesirable position, they will generally bargain with them rather than escalate the conflict further. They recognize that the extensive spy networks and sinister resources of the Scorpion Clan make extended courtly struggles difficult, if not fruitless. By winning a short-term victory and then making convenient political agreements, they seek to keep the Scorpion under control without provoking full-scale political warfare. Sometimes these sorts of deals leave larger problems to fester, but they are generally considered acceptable victories against an often-dangerous opponent.

The Spider Clan

The affairs of a ronin otokodate are normally beneath the Imperial Families' notice. However, in the case of the Spider, the Otomo have reason to show some concern over the presence of members from this strange group at such events as the Emerald Championship. Simply put, they do not know who they are.

A few years ago, a lack of knowledge allowed the Gozoku to rise again. The Otomo have no intentions of permitting such a gross failure again, especially not within the same generation. They have begun mobilizing their agents in an effort to determine who, exactly, these Spider are, whether they are simply arrogant and uncouth ronin or are a real threat to the throne and to Otomo power. For now, the Otomo simply observe, but soon they may find themselves forced to act.

The Unicorn Clan

The Unicorn, socially unrefined and displaying behavior that is barely accepted by the more liberal-minded as proper for a samurai, have rarely been a favorite of the Otomo family with its staunch traditionalism. The Unicorn are a troubling fly in the smooth ointment of the courts, a faction whose methods and goals are often set directly against those of more classical training. The Clan's peculiar obsession with honesty can make the most simple of negotiations a trial. To make matters worse, the Unicorn are also a significant military power in their own right whose ambitions seem to have no bounds.

Due to this peculiar mixture of odd court tactics and a powerful army, the Otomo have historically tended to both underestimate the Unicorn courtly presence and to work hard to keep the Clan weak. They have made a

fairly consistent effort over the years to undercut Unicorn attempts to achieve legitimacy within the courts, usually by playing up the Clan's limitations and cultural oddities. These tactics do have an unfortunate tendency to appear petty, stubbornly limiting the Unicorn's power while spiteful gossip damages its reputation.

Perhaps surprisingly, these efforts showed considerable results over the years, as the word of an Imperial carries considerable weight. In truth, for decades the Unicorn generally refrained from deep involvement in Imperial politics. However, with the Khan's recent move to try to seize power, that has changed, and the Otomo have begun to worry that their methods are no longer adequate. The Unicorn Clan's ability to forge alliances and persuade other Clans to stand aside during the Khan's march suggests they are no longer the political naifs of the past, and the Otomo are scrambling to develop new strategies for opposing them.

Notable Otomo NPCs

OTOMO HOKETUHIME, DAIMYO OF THE OTOMO FAMILY

Air: 6	Earth: 3	Fire: 4	Water: 3	Void: 5
Awareness: 8		Intelligence: 5		

Honor: 2.3	Status: 4.0	Glory: 5.7
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SCHOOL/RANK: Otomo Courtier 5/Master of the Courts 3

SKILLS: Artisan: Painting 2, Calligraphy (High Roku-gani, Otomo Cipher) 3, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 6, Deceit (Intimidation) 7, Defense 2, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Sincerity) 8, Games: Go 3, Games: Sadane 6, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Law 5, Meditation 3, Performance: Dance 5, Storytelling (Oratory) 5, Tea Ceremony 5, War Fans 2

ADVANTAGES: Allies (Many), Clear Thinker, Glib Tongue, Social Position (Otomo daimyo), Voice

DISADVANTAGES: Low Pain Threshold, Lost Love (Toturi III), Sworn Enemy (Shosuro Jimen)

Otomo Hocketuhime is one of the most experienced courtiers of Rokugan's current age. She has seen the passage of three different Emperors, survived countless

wars and armed conflicts, and steered the Otomo family through numerous major trials. She is a skilled, experienced, and knowledgeable woman, powerful and confident. Hocketuhime witnessed the fall of Otosan Uchi and saw the necessity of moving the Otomo closer to the Crane politically for a time in order to rebuild their physical base of operations and renew their prestige in the eyes of the Empire. Despite her advancing age, her appearance has taken on an almost timeless quality, much like her venerated career. There are few men or women in the entire length and breadth of the Empire who have seen or done nearly as much as her, and from that storied experience she has gained a wide pool of resources and allies to draw upon.

Hocketuhime has a long and storied history in the courts. Among the most infamous rumors that lurks around her in the courts is the closeness she had with the late Emperor Toturi III. Though their presumed romance never truly developed into a long-term affair, she is known to have retained a great fondness for him. She gained considerable political influence and clout from her association with Toturi III, and his death was an almost earth-shattering experience for her.

She has spent the time since attempting to help retain his legacy and his wishes for a strong Empire, even if it must now be under another dynasty. Though Hocketuhime does not dwell solely in the shadow of the late Emperor, much of who she has become stems from that relationship. What once, perhaps, was a feeling of love and adoration has grown and matured over decades into a healthy respect and likeness of mind. With time she has come to not only value the man and his strength of will and political acumen, but also his vision for the Empire, and she has refused to let Toturi III's dream entirely die. Perhaps that is why she has not rejected the Crane Clan's proposal that she should be Empress.

Hocketuhime's political power is considerable, and does not solely derive from the social status she possesses as the head of the Otomo family. She has accumulated more allies than most could even imagine, including not only the late Emperor but also the heads of the three Imperial Families, several Clan Champions, and numerous lesser daimyo. Through a mixture of curried favor, skill, poise, and raw charisma, she has built a near-overwhelming reputation within the courts. All courtiers know her as a cunning but fair-minded individual, worthy of respect. There is almost no one within

the Empire who would question her wisdom, and those few who would oppose her do not dare do so publicly.

Hoketuhime is capable of ruthless efficiency when her few enemies threaten her. However, while she can crush most political opposition, she generally chooses not to do so. Her cautious approach allows her to employ her power selectively, achieving almost anything when she truly is determined. For example, by calling upon her huge network of favors and allies, she was able to arrange contests to select new Emerald and Jade Champions without an Emperor on the throne.

Despite her skills and efforts, Otomo Hoketuhime has not always been successful in her goals, and she faces each new crisis with growing weariness. Although she has protected the throne through countless struggles, she has been forced to see the death of Toturi III and then of the Toturi Dynasty itself. Her ongoing efforts to reunite the Empire and offer it the hopes of a future peace and prosperity have become perverted into a personal power struggle with a man she suspects of harboring ambitions similar to Bayushi Atsuki: the new Emerald Champion, Shosuro Jimen. Thus, although her latest efforts have shown the extent of her power, they

have also shown its limitations. Perhaps this, too, has persuaded her to accept the Crane Clan's suggestions that she should be Empress.

Notwithstanding her failures and worries, Hoketuhime remains resolute and unbending, a commanding figure in Rokugani politics. No matter how weary she becomes in truth, she never allows it to show, nor will she falter in performing her sacred duties. She faced the Steel Chrysanthemum and helped to steer the Empire through the time of the Four Winds. Even should she be one day defeated by such foes as Shosuro Jimen, she will never do them the favor of appearing weak.

OTOMO TANEJI

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 5
Awareness: 5		Intelligence: 4		

Honor: 3.1	Status: 6.0	Glory: 5.2
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SCHOOL/RANK: Otomo Courtier 4

SKILLS: Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Manipulation, Political Maneuvering) 5, Craft: Sailing 2, Deceit (Intimidation) 4, Defense 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation) 3, Games: Go 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: Law 3, Storytelling (Oratory) 3, Tea Ceremony 4, Underworld 2



ADVANTAGES: Allies (Miya Hatori, 4/2 points), Clear Thinker

Otomo Taneji is a man whose upbringing and training have crafted him into a unique and unusual tool for his family. His grandfather was not originally a member of the Otomo family, but rather was one of the original followers of Yoritomo, a loyal Mantis who married into the Otomo family. Otomo Mokihara earned his prestigious marriage after rescuing Otomo Daimesu, and while his life as an Imperial became one of privilege and wealth, he never forgot his roots. He and his son Shikan ensured that their line was trained not only in the ways of the Otomo, but also in the heritage of the Mantis.

Taneji often visited the Mantis Isles during his early life, gifting him with a breadth of knowledge and experience unique among the Otomo. He developed a knack for meeting and befriending new people, treating each of Rokugan's Clan cultures with respect. Having been raised both with the highly orthodox and traditional Otomo

and among the ambitious and unorthodox Yoritomo, he developed a far more lenient attitude towards differences of behavior and etiquette than others in the Imperial Families. This made him an almost natural born negotiator, and the Otomo have utilized him in this role for several years now.

Taneji has traveled throughout the Empire, and served as a facilitator and peacemaker alongside the noted diplomat Miya Hatori for many years. These travels have taken him to many different courts, and his respectful and kind-hearted attitude has helped endear him to those who have made his acquaintance. There are hundreds of samurai in Rokugan who remember his candor and sincerity and the courtesy he has shown them while he was a guest in their household.

Taneji is now a veteran representative to the Imperial courts, and remains a facilitator and peacekeeper. While many of the Otomo serve the family through the breaking of alliances and the sundering of bonds, Taneji works through a different fashion. He is by no means disloyal to the goals of the Otomo, though he is



unaware of the family's deepest secrets. However, he operates not by sowing discord but by stymieing of the ambitions of the Empire's most warlike. Calming, placating diplomatic entities such as Taneji, quite unlike what one expects of the average Otomo courtier, can have a significant impact on the ability of militaristic leaders to gather power and support.

What truly makes Taneji unique, perhaps, is the fervor with which he believes in the cause of peace. While he assisted the work of Miya Hatori, he saw first-hand the distress and suffering inflicted on the people of Rokugan by violent wars. He legitimately believes it is part of his duties as a servant of the throne to protect these people. That sincerity has won more than one over to his point of view, while making him an asset to his more conventional cousins.

Since the last great Imperial Winter Court of 1169, Taneji has grown in authority within the Otomo family. No longer a servant of Miya Hatori, he has become a figure of power and authority in his own right. His experience and many successes have attracted the attention of Otomo Hoketuhime, who has made him a hata-moto within the family, granting him the social status necessary to speak more openly and effectively within the courts. Before, his reputation was often his greatest weapon, especially when speaking with powerful generals and war-leaders. Now, his position in the *kuge* means that his voice must be heard for itself.

True to his nature, Taneji has not abused this power or authority. The Otomo name is in his mind a privilege and a duty, not merely a right given him by birth. Although he could now use his social position to force others to listen, he continues to prefer to convince them through his sincerity, winning them over by courteously hearing their cases and showing concern for their needs. The current state of the Empire, however, worries him deeply. With the final fall of the Toturi Dynasty, he has seen signs that the Empire is in danger of collapsing in upon itself, disintegrating into an endless war of all against all. There is almost nothing one man can do to stop this state of affairs. Still, he carries on, refusing to stop in what he sees as a near-holy labor. Every soul he helps to rescue from the ravages of war is a small victory, one that grants him spiritual sustenance in the midst of a war-torn Empire.

OTOMO RENJIRO

Air: 4	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 3
Awareness: 5		Intelligence: 4		
Honor: 2.7		Status: 5.0		Glory: 1.2

SCHOOL/RANK: Otomo Courtier 3/Otomo Orator 1

SKILLS: Calligraphy 1 (High Rokugani), Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Deceit (Intimidation) 3, Defense 2, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation) 4, Games: Shogi 1, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 1, Lore: Law 4, Performance: Singing 2, Storytelling (Oratory, Poetry) 5, Tea Ceremony 1

ADVANTAGES: Inner Gift: Empathy, Voice

DISADVANTAGES: Bad Reputation (Impotent), Bitter Betrothal, Doubt (Deceit), Lost Love (Seppun Tanaka)

Otomo Renjiro is one of the attendants assigned to the recently ascended Amethyst Champion, Yoritomo Yoyonagi. He is a man who has remained a virtual unknown in the Empire's notable courts. Though well-versed in the arts of oratory, rhetoric, and debate, and born into the wealth and privilege of the *kuge*, and gifted in ways that few could imagine, he has never quite drawn the attention of those in seats of power. His most recent appointment, while it has given him some level of authority and prestige, has not yet brought him the renown one would expect.

In reality, this is Renjiro's preference. In his own eyes, he is a flawed and failed man who has proven beneath all of his own expectations and, worst of all, his father's. Renjiro's father, the famous Otomo Dsichi, was a demanding and harsh man towards his only son. The old man expected an unending chain of one political victory after another, and foisted his ambitions upon his own flesh and blood. Although Renjiro succeeded by the standards of almost any typical samurai, it was never enough in Dsichi's eyes.

To his father, every victory is merely the result of the bloodline his son bears, not a sign of Renjiro's own talents or capabilities. Even Renjiro's acceptance at the elite school of the Otomo Orators was not enough to appease Dsichi's demands, since in his mind such acceptance was nothing more than Renjiro's privilege and right. Disgusted with what he always saw as a lackluster heir, he garnered the boy a marriage to a minor Otomo diplomat, viewing it as the best he could manage for such a boy. More recently, unpleasant rumors have sur-

faced about his son, suggesting possible infidelities with a now-deceased Seppun *miharu*, and Dsichi he become almost completely estranged from his son, refusing to contact him.

The end result of Renjiro's political 'failures' is that he is convinced that he is incapable of the most basic functions of the Otomo courtiers. He has been raised with the importance of the Otomo family's role ingrained within his heart. He has known from childhood just what sort of place he would be expected to fulfill in the family. He has always known that, deep within himself, he is special and should be capable of amazing feats. And with so much expected of him, he has responded only with self-doubt and self-loathing, preferring never to enter the limelight. He decided he was unworthy of working in the public eye, preferring to bolster the Empire quietly and unobtrusively, without drawing undue attention to his personal weaknesses.

In fact, Otomo Dsichi is completely wrong about his son. Renjiro is gifted with a unique and powerful empathy towards other people, a natural ability to sense their motivations and desires. He has a melodious, trained and almost perfect voice, one capable of speaking with great confidence in public speech, though he lacks the confidence to employ it in the traditional Otomo methods of deceit. Renjiro is a man whose constant striving for perfection and the approval of his father has left him deeply imperfect, but still highly skilled at what he does best.

It is with a certain amount of surprise that he has assumed his new role as an aide to the Amethyst Champion. Perhaps his superiors recognized his talents, despite his lacking of great political victories. Perhaps Yoritomo Yoyonagi herself saw beneath his carefully veiled self-loathing to recognize his almost frightening understanding of human beings, far more skilled than many courtiers his age. It isn't clear which is true, or if some other power is at work behind the scenes, but he has unexpectedly achieved a position of authority which gives him access to the courts of the entire Empire.

Trapped within a role he would never believe himself able to fulfill, Renjiro is beginning to blossom. He is not surrounded by those who demand of him the impossible, but instead only by those who see him as a tool of some worth. His speeches have won attention in the courts, aiding the work of the Amethyst Champion and winning the Otomo new political friends.

Where Renjiro's path will ultimately take him is unclear. His past haunts him to this day, filling his memories with the many mistakes he feels that he has made. He has never found his father's respect and never developed into the man he believes he should have been. And yet, there are still those who believe that he not only qualified to serve, but worthy to serve in a place of power. Whether he will truly rise from the ashes he was born in, only time will tell.



Imperial Characters in Your Campaign

Members of the Imperial Families, especially the Otomo, enjoy a number of powerful advantages in the Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game. From a mechanical standpoint, they have access to very potent Schools and powerful Advantages, including the new Otomo-only Advantage of Obiesaseru listed here. This alone can make an Imperial character unbalancing to a group of characters, even without the more potent (if intangible) social and role-playing advantages which an Imperial enjoys. Minor officials who might obstruct ordinary characters will tend to fall all over themselves to assist an Otomo or Seppun, and even governors and other high-ranking officials can sometimes be cowed by the image of Imperial authority.

The GM should consider carefully whether to allow Imperial characters into the game, since their intrinsic advantage can leave other players feeling as though their characters are little more than hangers-on. Here are a couple of potential solutions to this problem:

The All-Imperial Group. The problem of power-imbalance can be easily solved by having all of your players run Imperial characters. This can actually make for quite a viable game, since some Imperials train at other Schools as guests of their dojos, allowing the group to have a full variety of capabilities. Such characters could represent a "trouble-shooting" team sent out by one of the Imperial daimyo to quietly deal with serious problems across the Empire.

The Noble and Escorts. If your players are mature enough, you can embrace the power-imbalance by having them create a group of samurai who have been assigned to assist a powerful Imperial agent. In this case, the player running the Imperial character will have to be picked with special care, since she will have to be able to direct the other players' actions without abusing her power and leaving them frustrated and helpless. This option works especially well if the Imperial is a courtier, since she will be forced to take a back-seat and rely on the other characters whenever physical danger threatens.

Courts of the Otomo

For centuries, the Otomo family's main seat of power was Otsan Uchi, the Imperial City, where the family dwelt in direct proximity to the Hantei Emperors. Here their power was immense, and it was quite common for even minor members of the Otomo family to be appointed to important positions in the city's vast bureaucracy, making it impossible to accomplish anything there without their help. They also controlled the Imperial libraries and official histories, working with the Ikoma family to make sure that nothing embarrassing to the dynasty ever made it into the records.

After the fall of Otsan Uchi, the Imperial Families were bereft, especially the Otomo. It was almost half a year before the new capital was established in Toshi

Ranbo, and much longer than that before the new city was rebuilt to match the splendor of the old. The Otomo themselves set about rebuilding their family castle within the lands of the Crane, creating a new Kyuden Otomo on the shores of the Heart of Yakamo. From there they have worked diligently to rebuild their power and prestige, and while the modern Otomo do not have the sheer, overwhelming political weight of their ancestors, they are still a force to be reckoned with in Rokugan's courts.

Kyuden Otomo

The new seat of the Otomo family, constructed in the years following the coronation of Toturi III, is a splendid structure, one of the most beautiful palaces in Rokugan. The Crane Clan generously donated some of their own land for the palace, as well as money, building materials, and hundreds of laborers and skilled artisans to build and decorate the new castle. The new Kyuden Otomo stands atop a low cliff near the coast

of the Heart of Yakamo, looking down on a modest but well-equipped town whose residents are sworn vassals of the Imperial family. The castle has been built with diplomacy in mind, and indeed played host to the Imperial Winter Court of 1169, and eventful court disrupted by the news of the Winter of Red Snow. The following year the castle was host to one of four major Winter Courts held that season, and guests included Doji Domotai and Akodo Setai, among others.

The castle has all the usual amenities, including splendid gardens which are said to be nearly as impressive as those of Kyuden Doji. It is also equipped with special ambassadorial quarters, small sub-buildings placed in separate locations around the castle compound. Much like the Clan guest-houses in the old Imperial palace complex in Otosan Uchi, these embassy buildings allow Clan delegations visiting Kyuden Otomo to meet in private or to receive guests without impinging on their Imperial hosts.

The court at Kyuden Otomo is a highly formal affair, presided over by Otomo Hoketuhime, the daimyo of the family. She is a traditionalist Imperial and a canny and experienced courtier, and makes sure her court runs smoothly and without incident even during times of great tension such as the Winter of Red Snow. (Indeed, it is a remarkable testimony to her force of will that no duels were fought in Kyuden Otomo that winter, despite the presence of Lion and Unicorn delegations which were all but at each others' throats throughout the season.)

The Imperial Court of Toshi Ranbo

There are actually several courts in the Imperial capital, as each of the city's district governors maintains his or her own court. But the most important and noteworthy court in the capital, by far, is the main Imperial Court, where the Emperor and his chief advisors hold sway. Unlike other courts, which are typically at their most active during the winter, the Imperial Court of Toshi Ranbo is most active during spring and summer – in winter, the Emperor and other high officials traditionally travel to the court of one of the other Clans.

The Otomo family's control of the Imperial bureaucracy gives them huge influence over the Imperial Court, since they can influence everything from when a courtier gets to deliver a petition to which Clan's artisans get to re-decorate a hallway. However, during the

present dynastic crisis, the power and influence of the Imperial Court is significantly reduced. The senior offices of Chancellor and Imperial Advisor remain vacant, and the Emerald and Jade Champions are each focused on pursuing their own goals away from the court. Otomo Hoketuhime has to some degree filled the void in the Imperial Court's power structure, but until a new Emperor is chosen, the Imperial Court will remain only a shadow of its normal glorious self.

New Mechanics

This section describe some new mechanical options for Imperial characters, especially courtiers.

New Path: Otomo Infiltrators (Courtier)

The Otomo family seeks to always remain informed about the plans and goals of Rokugan's Clans, both great and minor. To that end, the Otomo make sure to have guests at every significant court across the land. Although most of these guests are ordinary courtiers, some of them receive more specialized training, teaching them to be potent spies without ever leaving the courts which are their home. They traditionally supplement this special training with further schooling in the Crane dojos, learning magistrate techniques from the Clan which is their traditional ally in the courts.

Technique Rank: 2

Path of Entry: Otomo Courtier 1

Path of Egress: Doji Magistrate 1

Requirement: Must be a member of the Otomo family

Technique: Eyes of the Emperor

After studying another individual for one minute, you may take a Complex Action to make a Raw Perception Roll against a TN equal to 5 + (the target's highest School Rank x 5). If successful, you learn one of the following facts about the target: his highest Trait, his highest Skill Rank, his highest CP-cost Advantage, his highest CP-bonus Disadvantage, his Honor, his Glory, or his Status. You may use this Technique on one target

multiple times, but each time requires 1 minute of undisturbed study. You may target an individual with this Technique a maximum number of times per day equal to your Void Ring.

**New Advantage: Obiesaseru
[Inherent] (5 points, Otomo
Courtiers only)**

The courtiers of the Otomo School are taught a specialized form of psychological dominance known as Obiesaseru. Only Otomo can take this Advantage, and only if they are enrolled in the Otomo Courtier School.

The technique of Obiesaseru allows them to call on the power and awe of the Imperial name to enforce submission and obedience from loyal and honorable samurai of the Emerald Empire. To use the ability, you must take a Complex Action to pause and gather your willpower, and shout an appropriate command (typically something like, "Stop in the name of the Emperor!"). You then make a Willpower/Courtier Roll against the target's Willpower/Etiquette. If you win the roll, the target is momentarily stunned and halted by the impact of the command. On his next turn, he cannot move, attack, cast spells, or perform any other action which

would directly obstruct or threaten the Imperial. He may, however, use the Full Defense Posture.

This ability only works on honorable samurai (true Honor Rank 1.0 or higher) who are loyal to the Emperor. Further, a samurai who sincerely believes himself to be acting honorably on behalf of his lord and the Empire (as adjudicated by the GM) gains a Free Raise to resist the effect.

Obiesaseru does not work on those who are not of the Emerald Empire (gaijin, non-human creatures, etc.) or who do not revere the Emperor (criminals, bandits, the Lost, the Spider Clan). During times of political strife when the Emperor's power is in doubt (such as the Race for the Throne), Imperials using this Advantage must beat their target's roll by at least 1 Raise in order to succeed.

**New Advantage: Ear of the Emperor
[Granted] (Courtier only, 5 Points)**

You have acquired a more or less direct line to the Imperial Court, whether through familial connections, favors, social or political influence, or simple respect. The terms of the connection must be clearly defined,



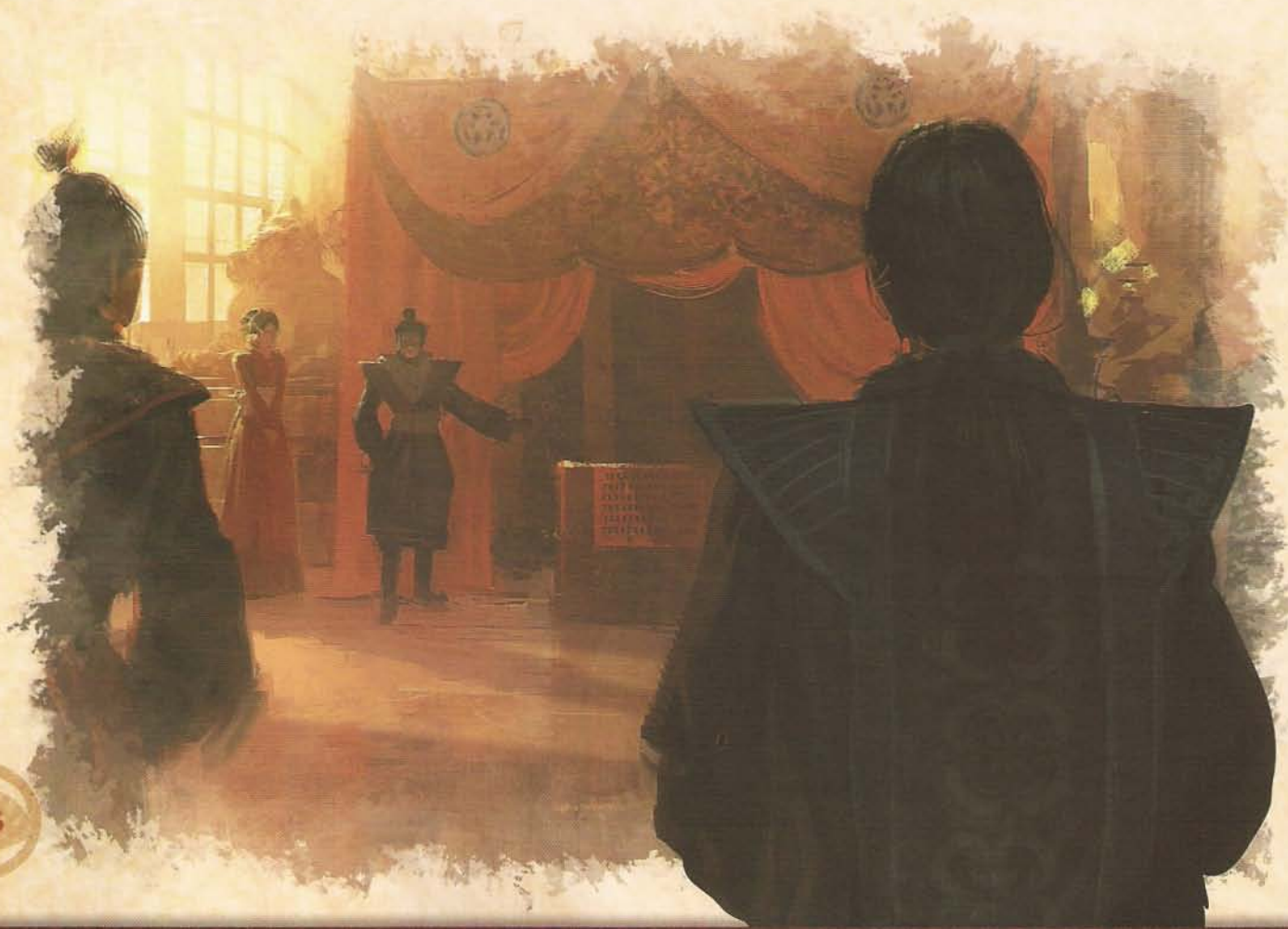
in cooperation with the GM, before you acquire this Advantage. Furthermore, this Advantage is closely tied to a political career, and only a character who has no Ranks in bushi or shugenja Paths or Schools may take it. Once you have this Advantage, you may invoke it at any time to try to deliver information or proposals to the Imperial Court, using reliable (or easily manipulated) third parties to deliver the information for you. Each such attempt to convey your views or ideas to the Imperial Court requires a successful Etiquette (Bureaucracy) Skill Roll against a TN of 20.

New Advantage: Sacrosanct [Granted] (10 Points)

You may only take this Advantage if you have an Honor Rank of 3 or higher and you have performed some great deed or service for the Emperor or a senior member of the Imperial government (e.g. the Chancellor, the Emerald Champion, or someone of similar rank). The GM must ultimately decide whether the deed you have performed is truly worthy of the Emperor (or the Imperial Court) awarding you this honor.

Due to the great service you have performed, you are placed under Imperial protection. This blessing remains so long as your Honor Rank remains no lower than 3 and you do nothing to defame or dishonor the Emperor or the Imperial government. In the meantime, attacking you or your immediate family is treason, tantamount to attacking the Emperor himself. Any person who strikes you in combat before you strike them loses 5 points of both Honor and Glory for every Wound Level they inflict. Anyone who kills you or knocks you unconscious loses a full Rank of both Honor and Glory, no matter their station. Only an Imperial decree can reverse or negate either of these effects.

The price of this wondrous protection is your utter and devoted loyalty to the Emperor and the Imperial government. Failing to fulfill that loyalty, to even a modest degree, will not only strip you of this Advantage but will likely cause you to lose all Status and be reduced to ronin, if you are not forced to commit seppuku.



MASTERS OF COURT

OTHER
NOTABLE COURTS

While the Scorpion, Crane, and Otomo unquestionably control the most significant and notable courts in the Empire, there are many other centers of political activity, great and small, spread throughout Rokugan. Since each Clan effectively acts as a semi-independent state under over-all Imperial authority, all Clans need places to receive diplomats, negotiate with trade envoys, and promote their political goals. Each Clan has its own political methods and styles, expressed through its courts, and a wise courtier will study all of the significant courts of the Empire in order to be prepared for a posting to any location. Even the Minor Clans have banded together and created a diplomatic center where they can force the Great Clans to deal with their lesser cousins on a more level playing field. Rokugan is a warrior society, and in the minds of samurai court is ultimately another battlefield. The wise commander prepares for each battlefield he might face.

Kudo Mura

The founders of this sleepy village on the border between Fox and Sparrow lands could never have dreamed that it would someday have an impact on the political landscape of the Empire. Instead of a source of strife between the two minor Clans who share its crops, it has become the headquarters for the diplomatic efforts of the Minor Clan Alliance. In an agreement at the Winter Court of 1169, the members of the Minor Clan

Alliance decided to build a court at Kudo where the Great Clans could meet easily with the representatives of any of the Alliance members. Further, with all of the Minor Clans gathering in one place, negotiations and agreements could be coordinated, so that the actions of one of the Clans would not harm or disrupt the efforts of another. This agreement has brought unexpected life and excitement to this once sleepy village. Tortoise Clan merchants and sailors rub shoulders with the talented bushi of the Monkey and the excitable warriors of the Hare, while listening to Sparrow storytellers talk at great length and detail about absolutely nothing. Even the new Oriole Clan and the seldom seen Ox, Badger, and Bat Clans each maintain a single representative in Kudo's court. Only the Fox are absent, having recently sworn allegiance to the Mantis.

Even with so many political representatives descending in Kudo Mura, it is still a modest border town. As such, it faces regular threats from bandits lured by its large granaries. In the light of this threat, the Minor Clans view Great Clan delegations to Kudo with a mixture of relief and dread. If the bandits from the surrounding lawless regions should ever organize a large-scale attack, the additional Great Clan bushi would be welcome supplements to Kudo's defenses. However, admitting such a need for additional forces would be a serious loss of face, suggesting the Minor Clan Alliance cannot properly protect its guests. Such an incident could have serious negative effects on the strength of the Alliance's positions in future negotiations.

Toku Kiyuko is the young governor of this isolated court. Not surprisingly, as both a single woman of honorable and glorious origin and the governor of such a potentially powerful holding, Kiyuko attracts numerous marriage offers from the premiere Families of the Empire. Fortunately, she has an excellent resource to assist her in dealing with this challenge: her mother, Toku Inao. Inao has retired from the leadership of the Monkey Clan and now resides quietly in Kudo Mura, serving as her daughter's personal advisor. With such an experienced ruler at her shoulder, Kiyuko can face whatever challenges come her way, even the advances of wily Kasuga suitors. For her own part, Inao has managed to see two of her other three children placed into extremely advantageous marriages, and she has no intention of letting her remaining daughter marry below her potential.

Aside from Kiyuko, there are other significant figures who visit the court of Kudo Mura. Many of the other Minor Clan daimyo make regular trips to Kudo to check up on their Clan diplomats and participate in important negotiations. Kasuga Taigen, the voice of the Minor Clans, can often be found in the village, keeping his pulse on the Alliance's affairs. As one of the masterminds behind the establishment of Kudo's new role, he has a large stake in the idea taking permanent root. He was not especially happy with Kiyuko's appointment as governor, but accepted it as a necessary concession to gain support from the Monkey Clan. Consequently, he is quite interested in seeing that the young Monkey weds one of his Tortoise cousins.

Kyuden Gyotei

Beyond the horizon from the southern Crane lands lies the most opulent palace in all of Rokugan. While the art and style of Kyuden Doji is of course without compare, the sheer wealth displayed in the Mantis stronghold of Kyuden Gyotei is unparalleled within the Empire. Since the Mantis lands are fairly small in area, and trade brings them such large profits, the Clan of Storms has had little else to do with their wealth than display it.

Kyuden Gyotei originated as a single building on a small rocky island. As the Mantis coffers swelled, century by century, the castle was expanded again and again, until it has become the sprawling complex it is today. Additionally, the Mantis' great wealth has bought the Clan works of fine art from all over the Empire and

even beyond. Rokugani paintings on silk screens stand beside wooden carvings from the Ivory Kingdoms and woven rugs from the Senpet lands. The combination is garish and even offensive from a traditional Rokugani point of view, but even the most traditional Lion who visits Kyuden Gyotei cannot help but admit the great wealth the Mantis have expended to gather this collection.

Samurai from all over the Empire who are looking for rare or difficult-to-obtain items often come to Kyuden Gotei to enlist the aid of the Mantis. Yoritomo's Clan relies on ocean-going trade, and has developed contacts in places where the land-bound Clans haven't even thought of looking. Naturally, such visits are often resolved not with mere payment (such would dishonor and insult a traditionalist Rokugani samurai) but through trade agreements and exchanges of favors. Besides, even for a mercantile Clan like the Mantis, a new trade contact that might possibly yield great returns for a long period of time is much more enticing than a simple bag of koku.

Even the wealthiest samurai attempting to deal with the Mantis will immediately be aware of the splendor that surrounds him. While a merchant from the Yasuki or the Daidoji Trading Council might be accustomed to using his wealth to give him a position of strength in trade negotiations, this is simply not possible with the Mantis Clan. The only way to entice the Mantis is to offer something their extensive trade network cannot find – typically, something political, since the Mantis are still laboring to build up their position in the mainland's courts. Thus, the court at Kyuden Gotei often sees negotiations that interweave trade with more conventional political matters in a way which most mainland Rokugani would find disturbing. Even when a courtier has something the Mantis want, he had best be prepared to bargain tooth and nail to gain any significant measure of advantage. The Mantis are nothing if not excellent traders.

The current Mantis Clan Champion, Yoritomo Naizen, is the ruler of Kyuden Gotei's court, and he well understands the nature of his Clan's strength. However, he has a personal political viewpoint as well. Naizen began his life as a pirate and has managed to rise to become the leader of one of a Great Clan. Because of his humble origins, he believes strongly that anyone of sufficient talent can raise their stature in the Celestial

Order. Naizen believes himself proof that one does not have to wait until a future rebirth to ascend the steps of the heavenly bureaucracy. Because of this, he has taken it upon himself to become the protector of the Rokugani heimen, and has re-oriented the Clan's political goals to match. This extends even to the treatment of servants in Kyuden Gotei – woe to those guests who treat servants in a harsh or dismissive fashion in the home of the Lord of Storms, for it can be assured that their dealings with the Mantis Clan will be significantly more difficult.

The Mantis and the Ivory Kingdoms

The Mantis Clan has acquired considerable wealth from its covert trade with the Ivory Kingdoms. This unusual commercial relationship developed through sheer chance. A Mantis kobune was blown off course while looking for new routes into Crab ports, and made landfall on a small unknown island. As they put into the island to gather fresh water and make repairs, the Mantis crew realized they were not alone. A strange group of swarthy men had also brought their ship to the isle, to harvest some of its timber. In traditional Mantis fashion, the crew managed to overcome their language differences and arrange a trade with the foreigners. Since then, the Mantis have established a trade route from this island to the Ivory Kingdoms themselves. In recent years, this relationship has even brought visitors from the Kingdoms to Rokugan, most notably the strange foreign warrior Rama Singh, who swore fealty to the Clan. That the Mantis would allow a gaijin to openly join their ranks is just one more example of their peculiar attitudes toward the Celestial Order.

Kyuden Ikoma

While the Lion are not known for their political acumen, the Ikoma family does maintain a diplomatic court in its home castle of Kyuden Ikoma. From this location, the Heart of the Lion conduct their business in a very traditional fashion, strictly following the rules of etiquette and hospitality. Indeed, in this way they are quite similar to their former enemies, the Doji. The

major difference is what pressure they can bring to bear upon visiting diplomats. Where the Doji rely on a mixture of favors, marriages, gifts, and subtle political and social pressure, the Ikoma rely on something a bit more blunt. One has only to look outside the windows of the Ikoma castle to understand what the Right Arm of the Emperor brings to the bargaining table. Kyuden Ikoma is a military fortress first and a diplomatic palace second, and the presence of hundreds of marching and drilling bushi accentuates this point rather nicely.

Since Kyuden Ikoma is a Lion military fortress, visitors are offered far fewer physical amenities than in other courts. The castle is downright ascetic, with none of the glorious art and perfectly-maintained gardens which characterize the courts of the Crane or the Scorpion. A hallway in Kyuden Ikoma might, at best, have a single painting or suit of armor posted at one end. To do less would be to claim that art was not important, an insult to the principles of Rokugani civilization, but to do more would be a distraction, both from their duty and from the statement they are trying to send to their visitors. Thus, the average courtier from elsewhere in the Empire probably finds Shiro Ikoma to be a dull and even oppressive place to visit – though not as bad as an assignment to Kyuden Hida, to be sure.

One of this court's major strengths is the availability of the Ikoma histories. The Lion Clan is nothing if not traditional. By carefully consulting these archives, the Ikoma courtiers can find precedent in the Empire's history for or against any possible decision. A courtier with an imaginative, unprecedented treaty will soon find the Ikoma offering him a half-dozen examples of why such an action is unwise, and pointing out the other, more suitable decisions made in the past during similar situations. It is difficult to argue with the decisions of one's ancestors, so courtiers preparing to visit the Ikoma court always take time to study their history and prepare to vigorously defend their positions with precedent and tradition.

The Ikoma family daimyo, Ikoma Korin, spends most of his time at Kyuden Ikoma, but he does not do so in order to deal with court. He is a military commander first and foremost, and his single major experience in politics, during the Winter Court of 1169, convinced him that court is a place he should never visit more than absolutely necessary. Indeed, he departed that court over a month early in order to join the Lion struggle against the Khan's armies.

In Korin's stead, the court at Kyuden Ikoma is dominated by Ikoma Yasuko, the wife of the great Lion general (and former Clan Champion) Ikoma Otemi. Yasuko is a former Scorpion, but she seems to be devoted to her husband, and manages the Lion diplomatic efforts here with supreme skill. Some whisper that Scorpion blood cannot be trusted, and that she is simply waiting for the best moment to betray the Clan, but so far their speculations have proven groundless. Few can argue that Yasuko has not been a huge political asset to her husband's Clan, and under her watchful eye the court at Kyuden Ikoma seldom produces any result unfavorable to the Lion.

Pale Oak Castle

The secretive Isawa family of the Phoenix decided early in the Empire's history that it was simply too dangerous to have large numbers of visitors wandering around their home castle. Kyuden Isawa contained too much magical knowledge, too many Clan secrets which could not be allowed to fall into the wrong hands. Thus, only a select few courtiers were permitted to attend the Elemental Council in its home. However, this created something of a problem when the Emperor chose for the first time to spend his Winter Court in Phoenix lands. Even the Isawa could not resist the opportunity to have the Emperor as a captive audience for an entire season. In order to properly facilitate the Son of Heaven, the Isawa decided to raise a new castle for the express purpose of hosting Winter Court. Once that decision was made, the choice of where to build such a palace was an easy one: they chose the place in Rokugan so peaceful that an earlier Emperor chose to be buried there.

Pale Oak Castle (Aojiroi Oku Shiro) was built with the intention of being the perfect castle for courtiers to gather. Its design allows for breathtaking views of the Pale Oak Plains, and it boasts beautiful galleries full of the tranquil art of the Empire's most pacifistic Clan. The court chambers are wide open to promote free interaction amongst the guests, but the castle is also designed with numerous alcoves and smaller meeting rooms where serious diplomacy can take place out of the public eye. The most spectacular feature of the castle is the ancient oak tree growing within its central courtyard. The Isawa claim this tree grows on the site of the grave of Hantei XVII, and for this reason no one is allowed to touch it. Indeed, the blessing of the Hantei

family courses through the very being of this tree, and its blossoms and sap provides the Phoenix with powerful magical ingredients for their research.

The court at Pale Oak Castle serves as the Phoenix Clan's primary court for dealing with other Clans, and as such handles all manner of diplomatic and political negotiations. Courtiers assigned to Phoenix lands usually angle for the chance to attend this court, where the major political action takes place, much as courtiers sent to the Crane lands hope for a posting to Kyuden Doji. Of course, the Phoenix are not known as an especially political Clan, and the negotiations at this castle tend to have a far more relaxed and scholarly atmosphere than those at the great castles of the Crane and Scorpion.

The current governor of Pale Oak Castle is none other than the Elemental Master of Air, Tamori Nakamuro. Indeed, this position has traditionally been given to the Master of Air for centuries. However, the Master often finds himself away from his post here, either meeting with the rest of the Elemental Council or overseeing other important business for the Clan. Because of this regular absence, the true administration of the palace falls upon the castle's captain of the guard, typically a Shiba. Shiba Majushi currently holds this post, and has served with talent and honor for several years. Few questioned Majushi's ability to perform his duties until the Test of the Emerald Champion last year. The normally stalwart and calm Majushi allowed himself to be tempted into an outburst by Shosuro Jimen during a game of Go. After apologizing to the others present, Majushi withdrew from the Emerald Tournament in dishonor. This would have been an unfortunate event in any era, but in the current politically charged atmosphere created by the empty throne, it has seriously undermined Majushi's ability to oversee Pale Oak Castle. More than one courtier is wondering what Majushi will do when Jimen, the new Emerald Champion, decides to visit this stronghold.

Shiro Ide

The home of the Ide family was built on the shores of Chrysanthemum Lake and rests against the backdrop of the Seiketsu Mountains. It is designed to accentuate and embrace the surrounding natural vistas, blending in with the already spectacular background, a studied contrast to the design of other notable diplomatic castles like Kyuden Doji or Kyuden Gyotei. Shiro Ide

is a tall and narrow castle with eight complete floors above the ground, blending gaijin and Rokugani architecture into a seamless whole. The castle color scheme also plays a role in the illusion that it is a part of the natural landscape. The castle's lower levels mirror the blue-green of the peaceful lake before it, while the upper reaches fade to gray and eventually white to match the mountains rising behind it. The entire effect fosters a sense of tranquility and peace with nature, design features that the Ide carefully foster as part of their more general approach to politics.

As the Unicorn Clan's first and most important representatives in the courts of Rokugan, the Ide have always sought to approach politics in a non-threatening, almost pacifistic style, very different from the martial tone maintained by the rest of their Clan. Indeed, this air of friendship and serenity is the primary tactic of the Ide in their own courts, right down to the art that decorates their castle halls. Even Matsu and Hida diplomats are visibly affected by the relaxed, welcoming atmosphere of Shiro Ide, finding it

difficult to employ their typically brusque and aggressive approach

against the friendly, open-handed Unicorn courtiers. The Scorpion suffer in these halls for a different reason, however. The Ide are samurai who focus on honest, open speech, and they come across as men and women at peace with themselves. Such folk seldom have secrets to be exploited. Scorpion courtiers have traditionally found visits to Shiro Ide quite frustrating, although they persist as best they can.

Shiro Ide is one of the Unicorn Clan's more important diplomatic settings, and those courtiers who visit there are most typically coming to discuss matters of high politics – alliances, treaties, or exchanges of territory – or to seek an audience with the Khan. In addition, the court here discusses matters of trade and commerce, for the Ide family is often heavily involved in the Unicorn Clan's mercantile activities. However, such distasteful topics are carefully kept out of the main courts. In the current environment of the Empire, with many Clans openly hostile to the Unicorn after the Khan's failed march on the capital, visitors to Shiro Ide and the other Unicorn castles are sadly far fewer than in the past, but the Ide persist in their work, and make sure any discussions here take place in an atmosphere of openness, relaxation, and friendship.

The master of this court is a man who suffers from perhaps the most divided loyalties in the Empire. Ide Tang was chosen to succeed the venerable Ide Tadaji as daimyo to the Ide family. He is a brilliant courtier who has offered the Khan extremely useful and profitable advice. He has also managed to establish better relations between the Unicorn and their long-time enemies in the Scorpion Clan. This, however, was a relatively simple action for Ide Tang, since he is in truth a Shosuro actor. He is the leader of the Unicorn Clan's diplomatic efforts and at the same time the best-placed spy in the Empire. While he never expected to achieve such a remarkable level of infiltration, Tang makes the best of the good fortune granted to him. His diplomatic efforts with the Scorpion have given him ample opportunity to report regularly to his master, Bayushi Paneki. However, he also assists the Khan with a vigor that



The Spider in Shiro Ide

Shiro Ide is not just a prominent court in Unicorn lands. It is also notable as one of only two Great Clan courts where the Spider have been welcomed openly. Their true nature is not known to the Unicorn, of course, and they represent themselves as an organized group of ronin who do what the Empire's magistrates have been unable to do. Their position in the courts of Shiro Ide is not currently as valuable to the Spider as the one they hold in Kyuden Kumiko, however, since at present few other Clans visit the Ide court. When emissaries do arrive, they often are simply trying to get a request or appeal to Moto Chagatai, but are unwilling to approach him directly. When Ide Tang is unable to provide them help in this regard, Daigotsu Susumu will offer his services.

Susumu gained access to the court of Shiro Ide after he offered the Spider Clan's help to the Unicorn in their fight against the Lion. This does not mean he is not eyed with suspicion, but the Unicorn have a somewhat unusual view of people who do not fit into the standard definition of a loyal samurai of the Empire. They tend to be more willing to judge individuals on their own merits, and realize that those who fight for their convictions in the name of Rokugan can come in different forms. The Spider Clan's willingness to fight against banditry (and against the Lion) makes them honorable enough for Moto Chagatai. The Unicorn know what it is like to be viewed with suspicion and looked down upon as outsiders. They will not dismiss a potential useful ally for such reasons.

While Susumu tries to gain leverage with visitors to Shiro Ide, his primary role is to strengthen

ties with the Unicorn themselves. He will use any opportunity to sing the praises of his Clan. He reports regularly on the Spider's successes in ferreting out threats to the Empire. He also acts as an intermediary between the forces of the Spider and the leadership of the Unicorn, for Lord Daigotsu does not want direct contact between any of his generals and the samurai of the Unicorn – his military commanders are not all as well versed in deception as Daigotsu Susumu.

The Spider aid to the Unicorn is not altruistic in the least. Daigotsu knows that if the Spider are forced into open warfare against the Clans, the Lion will be the greatest threat. He hopes the Spider Clan's assistance will let the Unicorn do severe damage to the Lion armies, weakening them against the possibility that the Spider may have to face them alone in the future.

Susumu has to a certain extent been successful in his goal of strengthening ties with the Unicorn, but he has had less success with the few visiting emissaries he has encountered. The primary problem is that, at the moment, most visitors only want the ability to speak to Moto Chagatai and, despite claims otherwise, Susumu has no access to the Khan. Susumu continues claiming he can help, if only to try to find out what these emissaries want with Chagatai. He is rarely successful in extracting even that much, as there are very few who would believe that an unknown courtier representing an upstart band of bandit-fighting ronin has the ear of the Khan over someone like Ide Tang.

Susumu knows that Daigotsu does not have patience with failure, and the courtier's initial success with the Unicorn will be quickly forgotten if he cannot maintain his usefulness to the Dark Lord.

makes him an unquestionable asset to the Unicorn. It is often said that no man can serve two masters, but Ide Tang seems to be trying to do just that – and with at least some measure of success. How long even this master actor can prolong his performance, however, remains to be seen. The Scorpion do not tolerate disloyalty, and the Unicorn would surely execute him as a traitor if they ever learned the truth.

Shiro Kitsuki

While the Kitsuki family is best known for its skilled and able investigators, the Kitsuki also provide a face to protect the rest of the enigmatic Dragon Clan. Their castle sits in a pass that protects the Mirumoto and Tamori holdings, as well as the High House of Light, from outsiders. Few Great Clan samurai ever pass beyond this point into the central Dragon lands. Instead they

find themselves tested repeatedly for their worthiness to visit, first by the Dragonfly of Kyuden Tonbo, and then by the Kitsuki.

The Tonbo are an autonomous minor Clan, but they serve as the gatekeepers of Kyuden Kitsuki due to their ancient obligations to the Dragon Clan. Traditionally, they do not allow any samurai to pass until they receive word from the Kitsuki family. Unfortunately, at present they are not always able to perform this duty to their full ability. During the Dragon-Phoenix War, the Lion Clan nearly exterminated the Dragonfly, and while their lands were restored by the mystical might of Totori Sezar, the loss of life takes longer to recover. With fewer bushi to patrol the roads, petitioners bound for Dragon lands can sometimes bypass the Tonbo gatekeepers.

Once travelers reach Kyuden Kitsuki, they are forced to stop and accept the hospitality of the Clan's second-youngest family. Only the most driven or rude would attempt to progress beyond this point, and given the strange nature of the Dragon mountains, it is debatable whether they could even succeed – setting aside the presence of Mirumoto garrisons who watch the roads. Consequently, the Kitsuki are willing to allow visitors to wander their home freely. There are few secrets in Kyuden Kitsuki, for the family believes in exposing the truth for all to see and judge.

Since Kyuden Kitsuki is essentially a gatekeeper court, it tends to be populated chiefly by petitioners hoping they will be allowed to pass on into the Dragon lands to visit Shiro Mirumoto or even the High House of Light. Given the nature of the Dragon, these petitioners often wait in vain, and much diplomatic activity ends up taking place at Shiro Kitsuki simply because the visiting diplomats are unable to speak with anyone else. Courtiers from other Clans tend to dread an assignment to visit the Dragon lands, especially Shiro Kitsuki, for not only are the Dragon notoriously enigmatic and mysterious, but the Kitsuki themselves are extraordinarily skilled at sniffing out falsehood, deception, and manipulation. Scorpions in particular find the Dragon lands quite unrewarding for their conventional tactics, and give thanks that at the moment, their Clan enjoys good relations with the Dragon, freeing them from the necessity of trying to lie to a Kitsuki.

The current mistress of Kyuden Kitsuki is the family daimyo and noted investigator Kitsuki Iweko. She is extremely loyal to the Clan, and to Togashi Satsu personally. Keeping secrets in her presence is like trying to light a candle amidst a hurricane, and when she is present in her court even the cleverest Cranes and most skilled Scorpions restrain their impulses to deceive. Some things can simply not be done. Indeed, such are her skills of perception and deduction that she was one of the first senior Dragon to suspect that something untoward was happening amongst the Hoshi and Hitomi Families. Her suspicions were ultimately confirmed and resolved by Satsu himself, but she can't help but worry that her Clan Champion is overlooking some valuable remaining piece of the puzzle.

Toshi Ranbo

Although the Imperial Court is the most prominent political arena in Toshi Ranbo, overshadowing all else within the city, an inexperienced courtier newly arrived at the capital is unlikely to be immediately allowed access. Instead, he must prove his ability to not make a fool of himself (and his Clan) through service in the city's lesser district courts. Thus, few courts in the Empire receive as many visitors from as many different Clans as the district courts of Toshi Ranbo, among which four stand out with special prominence: the courts of the Ichidou, Kurai, Senzai, and Shijou Districts. Within the walls of these four very different courts, young would-be political masterminds can prove their worth against the rising stars of other Clans with considerably less risk to their reputation or their Clan's interests. These district courts are as diverse as the Clans themselves. By serving in each of them, a courtier can prove his abilities to his Clan in a variety of different circumstances and situations. Newly prominent courtiers like Yoritomo Yashinko first drew the attention of their superiors in these arenas, and were singled out for more important future endeavors on behalf of their Clans.

The Ichidou District of Toshi Ranbo

The Ichidou District is home to most of the city's major temples and shrines, including the temples to each of the Seven Fortunes, the city's Temple to Shinsei, the Temple of the Seven Thunders, and several other ma-

for religious sites, including a newly-built and somewhat controversial shrine to the Nezumi Nameseeker Te'tik'kir, sponsored by the Lion Clan. Of course, numerous smaller shrines are scattered throughout the Imperial metropolis, but the focus of its religious activities is in this relatively compact district, located close to the Imperial Palace.

As one might expect, the modest court of the Ichidou District is dedicated mainly to discussing religious matters, including coordination of the Empire's major religious festivals and celebrations (such as the Chrysanthemum and Setsuban Festivals), receiving various petitions for the construction and maintenance of major temples around the Empire, and dealing with the concerns of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Truly serious religious concerns are traditionally brought directly to the attention of the Emperor, who is the official head of the Rokugani religion, but with the throne empty this is no longer possible, and the importance of this small district court has become magnified accordingly.

The governor of the Ichidou District is Asako Raizaburo, a shugenja and a dedicated follower of the Tao. He was appointed to his position last year by the Phoenix, after the previous governor, Seppun Tohaku, died during the Khan's attack. Raizaburo is not a very skilled political operator – the Elemental Council seems to have chosen him mainly for his unquestionable piety – and he has found his new role to be more than a little overwhelming, especially once the Phoenix withdrew from the city and the Lion returned. Fortunately, he has the help and assistance of a far more able man, Seppun Kiharu, the Master of Ten Thousand Temples. Kiharu is a man with many decades of experience in both religion and politics, and he knows Raizaburo is an honorable and well-intentioned man. He also is a good friend and ally to the Lion Clan, and his sponsorship has so far protected the Governor from any significant Lion pressure. The longer the throne remains vacant, however, the more burdens will be placed on the Ichidou District court, and the more difficult Raizaburo's duties will become.

The Kurai District of Toshi Ranbo

The Kurai District is home to many of the city's nobles and prominent samurai, and also contains most of the significant Clan embassies and diplomatic residences.

This is the largest district in the city, and in the future, as the city continues to grow, will doubtless be subdivided into two or more separate districts. It suffered heavy damage during the Khan's attack at the end of the Winter of Red Snow, but reconstruction efforts got underway with little delay and now, a year later, there is little sign of the terrible fighting which raged through its streets and the fires which ravaged so many of its structures.

As the largest and most heavily populated district in the Imperial capital, the Kurai District also boasts one of the city's largest and most significant courts, second only to the Imperial Court itself. The samurai residents of the city bring the majority of their concerns to this court, expecting their Clan representatives to deal with everything from suppressing the latest crime wave among the heimin to deciding where the latest granary will be built. Every sort of local, petty, or secondary political concern that is too insignificant or localized to deal with in the Imperial Court is brought to the Kurai District court instead. Thus, this court serves a dual role for the Clan delegations in Toshi Ranbo: it is both a place for young courtiers to prove themselves while dealing with less important business, and a place to quietly shelve those courtiers whose talents have proven insufficient for more important duties, allowing them to continue serving their Clan without too great a loss of face.

The governor of the Kurai District is Ikoma Komet-su, a dignified samurai in late middle age, who earned this appointment after many years of service to Clan and Empire. He has little taste for politics, and generally presides over the court with a detached and almost amused air, watching as the courtiers wrangle over matters he considers to often be beneath the dignity of a samurai. His own attentions are occupied primarily with the governance of his district. In the time since the Winter of Red Snow, he has devoted himself to the labor of rebuilding the damage to the district, and has consequently spent even less time in court, allowing his various Imperial clerks and functionaries to run it as they see fit. Naturally, the Otomo have not discouraged this, since it serves to further increase their influence in the city.

The Senzai District of Toshi Ranbo

Within the quiet gardens and beautiful mansions of the Senzai District, an invitation to a garden party can be a declaration of war. This is where Toshi Ranbo's highest culture dwells, in beautiful gardens, Noh theaters, the Imperial Museum, and in the estates of the city's highest-ranking nobility. Here, wars of words are fought over the level of hospitality displayed by the residents, and the quality of the entertainments that they provide. A wind-blown ikebana arrangement can become a metaphor for a Clan's participation in any number of events around the Empire. A musician's song can send a courtier into seclusion for months if it is not performed perfectly.

In this environment, a courtier must be as steadfast as Hida and as clever as Kakita in order to make a name for himself. The court presided over by this district's governor is a small one, and it concerns itself almost exclusively with matters which a war-trained bushi might consider frivolous, questions of entertainment and culture, such as deciding which Clan's theater troupes will be permitted to perform in Toshi Ranbo in the next season. However, for the courtiers who negotiate such matters, they can be as intense as a military treaty. Rokugan is a place of civilization and culture, these courtiers like to point out. It is things like courtesy, art, and beauty which set Rokugan apart from the barbarian gaijin. Are not such matters worthy of a courtier's whole-hearted effort?

Kakita Kannabe, the Governor of the Senzai District, was born into one of the most prominent Families of artisans in the Crane Clan. Unfortunately, he possessed none of his lineage's ability to create fine art. Due to his family's reputation, he was still enrolled in the Kakita Artisan Academy, and passed from one sensei to another until there were none left willing to teach the boy. In order to avoid a significant loss of face, the family traded in a large number of political favors to send Kannabe to train with the Doji courtiers. At first, he did not seem to show much promise there either, but that changed when he began his first lessons in the game of Sadane. His upbringing among talented artists suddenly paid off, as he could detect flaws in works that even the instructors found difficult to spot. Furthermore, his aura of authority was so strong that even when he made up

a flaw, few were willing to challenge him on it. Kannabe quickly blossomed, developing a razor-sharp tongue which proved applicable to politics as well as games. His only limitation was a cruel streak that manifested in his harsh and relentless rhetorical attacks. This flaw has proven his undoing, for despite his appointment as a district governor, it is apparent that he will never rise higher in the echelons of the Crane Clan. As a result, he makes the court in his district a place of misery for those courtiers who attend it, especially if they seem promising types who might one day surpass him in the Clan's ranks. Any such courtier must learn to weather the biting gale of abuse Kannabe will inevitably heap upon him. If words are weapons, it can fairly be said that Kakita Kannabe plucked the Crane ancestral sword from the Heavens to use upon his enemies.

The Shijou District of Toshi Ranbo

The Shijou District composes the major markets and riverside docks of Toshi Ranbo. It is a clearing-house for goods arriving in the city, and an economic battleground for those who wish to channel the flow of those goods. Trade agreements are the coin of this district's court, and the trade delegations from the Clans spend much effort here maneuvering against their rivals. A Clan which cannot control the flow of its goods into the Imperial City is not only at an economic disadvantage but will also lose face, and with so many merchant patrons already embracing a somewhat un-samurai-like attitude, the tactics employed here can be somewhat cut-throat. Bribing the dock officials to delay or refuse sensitive shipments is a common tactic, and rival merchants frequently engage in nasty commercial disputes over the several marketplaces in the district.

The court of the Shijou District teaches the importance of duty like few others in the Empire, since the need to maintain a strong position for one's Clan can often trump all other considerations. Since Toshi Ranbo became the Imperial City, the Mantis have maintained a strong presence in this district and its court – indeed, one of the major Mantis ambassadorial residences is located here. However, the Phoenix expulsion of the Mantis last fall for brawling with the Lion has weakened their position here, allowing many rival courtiers to breath quiet sighs of relief.

The district governor and master of its court is Daidoji Kuro, a member of the Daidoji Trading Council and a Crane with a Crab's sense of duty. A city the size of Toshi Ranbo requires a great deal of food in order to function effectively, and as the governor of the city's market district Kuro is charged with ensuring that those needs are met, as well as seeing that the choicest and most magnificent supplies make their way to the Imperial palaces. These are far less simple tasks than they may appear. Constantly shifting trade agreements between Clans, and the presence of so many highly competitive mercantile-minded courtiers, ensure that every day in the district court is an adventure. Only during deep winter is Kuro able to relax somewhat, as the Imperial Court moves to its winter home and the pressures of duty ease. Now, with the throne empty, Kuro's position has become even more difficult. Each Clan seems to believe they best know how to properly distribute the resources of the capitol, and without the weight of the Emperor's power behind him, Kuro has found it increasingly difficult to counter their pressure. In recent months he has been forced to resort to almost Harrier-like tricks in order to maintain the upper hand.

Yasuki Yashiki

Resting on a cliff overlooking Earthquake Fish Bay, the home of the Crab half of the Yasuki family is another of the great castles of Rokugan. The Yasuki have used their ability to create wealth even amidst the poorest circumstances to build a magnificent palace. The central tower of Yasuki Yashiki is taller than many of the other great castles in the Empire, and magnificent works of art procured by the family are displayed prominently throughout the holding. Additionally, as the seat of a long-standing conflict between the Crane and the Crab Clans, it is a very defensible castle. Fortifications have carefully been worked into the castle's facade so that instead of marring the beauty of the Yasuki home, they harmonize with it, creating a union of beauty and strength. That is the image the family wishes to project to others.

Visitors to Yasuki Yashiki find that the art displays are not arranged in a random fashion. Rather, they are grouped in specific orders so that the Yasuki can use them to judge the tastes and values of their petitioners. A samurai who spends time wandering through the hall of weapons might find himself leaving with an agreement to trade for Crab-forged weapons when he was

trying to trade for tea. Many visitors have left the Yashiki wondering how they ended up trading for something they never intended. This is just one of the tricks the Yasuki use to keep the Crab supplied, even in the midst of Crane embargoes and bitter wars.

When the Shogun claimed control of Yasuki Yashiki during the Four Winds era, the Crab quietly helped maintain the palace while Kaneka occupied it. When he left for the capital and the Phoenix lands, the Yasuki just as quietly began to reassert their control, even while continuing to supply the troops of his personal army which remained behind. Several improvements to the castle were completed during Kaneka's occupation. The docks just south of the palace were expanded to give the Mantis who supported him better facilities for their kobune. Additionally, the fields north of the castle were turned into a major staging ground for troops. Part of Hida Dayu's forces began the recent campaign against the Crane from these fields. As always, the Yasuki took a difficult situation and turned it into an advantageous opportunity. Since Kaneka's death, of course, they have regained full control of the castle.

As one might expect, the court of Yasuki Yashiki focuses very heavily on matters of trade. Indeed, few samurai would bother to visit the castle for any other purpose. The Yasuki are among the most openly mercantile Families in the Empire, seldom even bothering to cloak their activities beneath the polite euphemisms of "merchant patrons" employed by other groups like the Daidoji Trading Council. Any courtier who visits Yasuki Yashiki does so knowing full well that trade is the matter to be discussed. Those who wish to speak of more conventional diplomatic matters, such as military alliances or dynastic marriages, are instead shunted toward Face of the East Castle.

Currently, the Yasuki family has no official daimyo of record, and a significant number of Yasuki remain in the Crane Clan. However, Yasuki Jinn-Kuen has recently been introducing himself as the Yasuki family daimyo, and has asserted control over the court at Yasuki Yashiki. Jinn-Kuen is a financial genius who has made more money for the Crab than anyone except perhaps the famous Yasuki Taka. Jinn-Kuen shares another feature with Taka – he is a secret member of the Kolat, the Master of Coin. He manages to divert a small portion of his family's profits to fund Kolat activities around the Empire.

SILKEN WORDS CARRY DEATH AS SURELY AS A KATANA

Far from the fields of war, the Great Clans of Rokugan struggle against each other behind the walls of elegant palaces and amidst the theater of great public events. They understand that politics and diplomacy — the arts of the court — are no less important to their ongoing fight for power and influence than the sword and the bow.

But as with war, the subtleties of court play a more prominent strategic role for some Clans than for others. *Masters of Court* views three such Clans — the elegant Crane, the cunning Scorpion and the relatively new and enigmatic Spider — through the lens of their practice of diplomacy. One chapter is also devoted to the Otomo Family and their relationship to the Great Clans. *Masters of Court* features:

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- Descriptions of palaces that serve as particularly important focal points of political and diplomatic activity.
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- New mechanics for the Otomo, the manipulative arm of the Imperial families.
- Profiles and NPC stats for prominent and otherwise interesting political figures in the Crane, Scorpion and Spider Clans.

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